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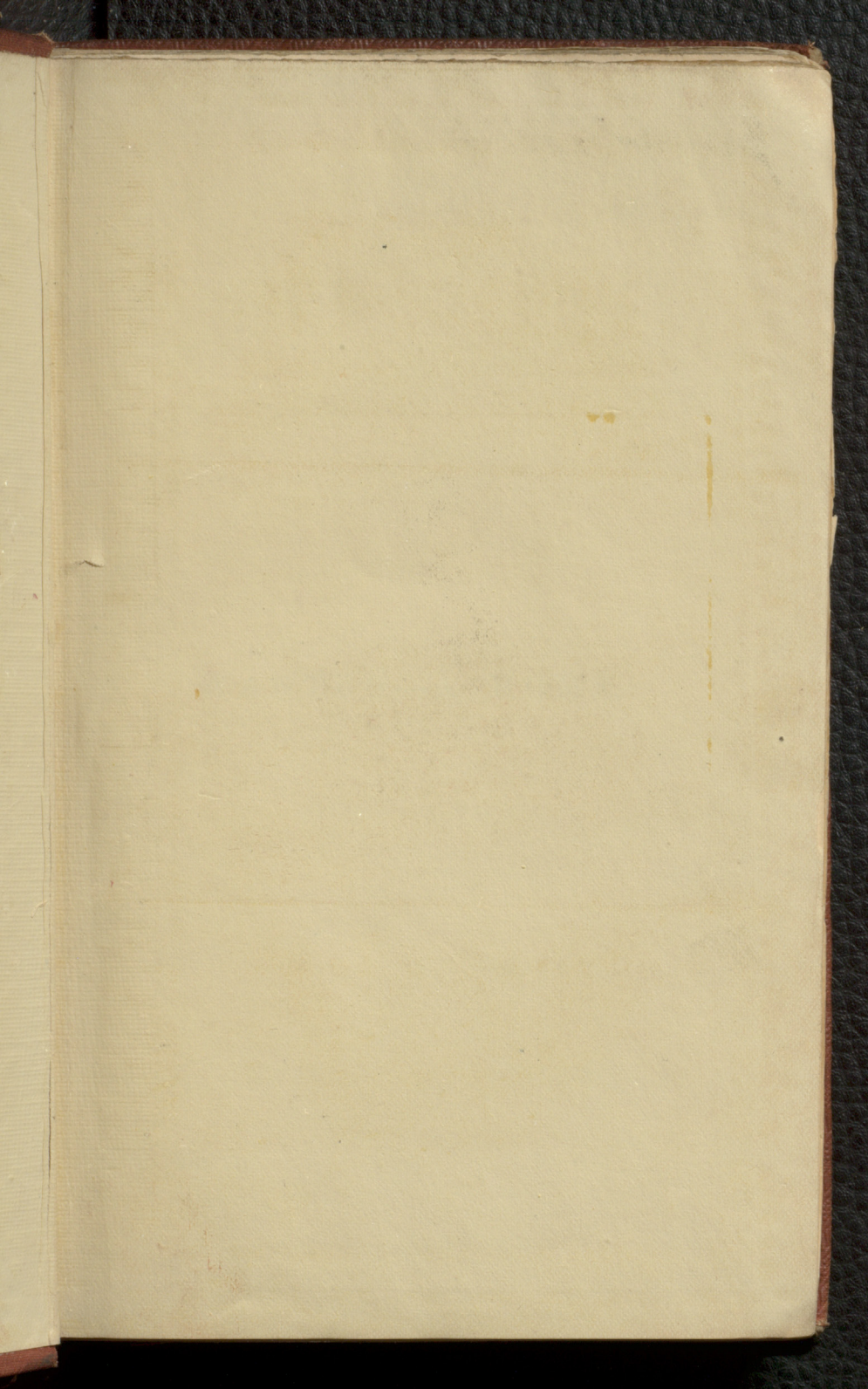
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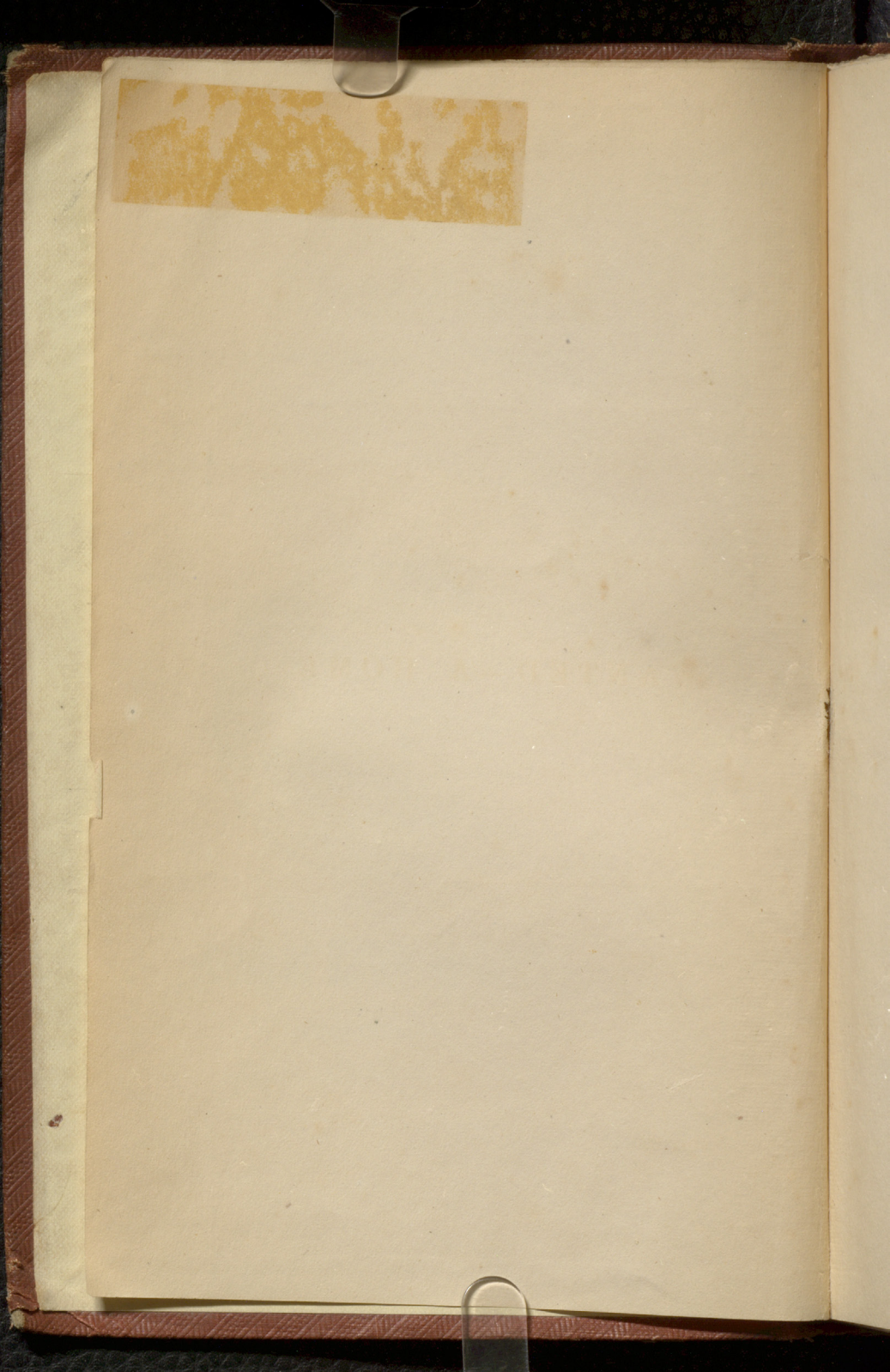
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WANTED—A HOME.

VOL. III.

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WANTED-A HOME

FOR THE



# WANTED—A HOME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"MORNING CLOUDS," "THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE,"  
ETC. ETC.

"Ho detto e lo ripeto, non ho scritto per tutti, anzi non ho scritto per più;  
sibbene per quelli che davvero soffrono ed hanno sofferti."—CESARE CANTÙ.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

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# WANTED-A HOME.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"MORNING GLOOM," "THE ROMANCE OF A DULL LIFE,"  
AND OTHER NOVELS.

"The author of 'Morning Gloom' has no other work in progress at present."  
—"The Morning Gloom" is a very good story."  
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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

[The right of Translation is reserved.]

W. H. ALLEN, 1, BLOOMSBURY PLACE.

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# WANTED—A HOME.

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## CHAPTER I.

“Das Schöne stirbt, der Glanz löscht aus,  
Das Irdisch-Schlechte baut sein Haus,  
Und spricht von seinem Felsenthron,  
Den hohen Göttersöhnen Hohn.”—L. TIECK.

THE following day the Chadleighs went with Helen to an evening party which she expected to find even duller than the exercise of dining out. She was much dejected by something that had passed between Beatrice and herself as they drove to the house.

“Really, my dear, you don’t do yourself justice



in that old dress ; nothing could ever make you look common, or less than very pretty, but you look twice as well in white ; your complexion bears it better than one woman's in a hundred."

"It does not much matter how I look now."

"On the contrary, it was never of so much importance. You sometimes quite provoke me, dear, with the excess of your unworldliness ; the other day, when Sir James Beauchamp was with us, you were almost rude in your silence—a clever man who could have quite appreciated your turn of mind ; even Percy remarked upon it. It is such a pity that you should allow yourself to be misconstrued by one so well worth pleasing."

"It would be a worse misconception if I let him think that I wished to please him particularly."

"Yes, but there is no need to go so far the other way to prove the contrary."

"Nor should I, but that you—and every one,



seem to suppose that I am continually looking out for a husband. You know it is not the case; and I should be so much obliged, Beatrice, if you would not talk as if it was."

There was truth in the last observation of both speakers—a small sample of great annoyance in the minds of both. It was exceedingly annoying to Mrs. Chadleigh, when she had made an opportunity for Helen to shine, to see her so unlike her old self,—evidently not showing her best powers. And, without trying to account for the sad fact, she began to feel impatient with her for such silent depression; a witty lively beauty was the friend to whom she had offered a long welcome, and for this grave joyless companion she had no mind; and to-day she was in that irritable state of feeling which sometimes comes on after bestowing benefits on a person who behaves stupidly and otherwise thwarts the benefactor.

As for Helen, she had been feeling inclined to



be cross all day : it was perhaps from some slight prick of chagrin at her own readiness to prolong the visit—not recognized, and then soothed by humble thoughts,—and so its poison had spread through her whole system, as often a slight infusion of very intense virus will.

But lately she had often been irritable without any apparent cause, when nothing had vexed her particularly ; but, when the commonest details of a homeless life had smitten her heart with despair. The tempers of other people restrain our own with a kind of spiritual atmospheric pressure ; and thus it was, that sorrow affected Helen's temper more in company with her bland and easy-going friend than with her often angry cousins. As the two drove on in silence, Helen was chafing under the wounds of her pride, and saying to herself how infinitely degrading it was for one woman to talk and act as if another was to be disposed of like a marketable article.

It was a relief to them both when they reached



their destination : two large-drawing rooms, well filled, for the country. It was a party, given by a comparatively new acquaintance, and there were many people present who were unknown to the Chadleighs, even by name. During the first part of the evening, Helen, influenced by what had just passed, sat down beside a very loquacious and overpowering old lady, and gave her undivided attention,—at least as long as she could ; for long narratives about strangers, told with unnecessary emphasis, scatter the thoughts of the most patient listeners ; and Helen found herself again and again at a loss for the nominative case of her neighbour's intricate sentences. She rather thought that most of the stories thus told, bore upon the fate of one or other among the visitors present, but could seldom identify the person spoken of.

An elderly gentleman passed before her, to a group opposite the sofa where they were sitting, and she diverted the course of a fresh series of



anecdotes, by observing that she knew his face, but not his name.

“Oh indeed! how so, if I may ask? for he is not often in the neighbourhood: it is Sir Matthew Blinkhorn. I wonder you never heard the name if you have met him before.”

“It was in the most casual way possible, at the Great Exhibition. I chanced to be feeling very faint and wretched, and he had the kindness to get me a glass of water.”

And with the unconscious exaggeration of one who is glad to light upon any fact or feeling on which she can lay stress while conversing with a bore, and so take rest from listening, she described the incident more minutely; spoke of his great good-nature, and her pleasure in seeing him again, and learning who he was. She fancied she had heard the odd name before, but knew nothing whatever of him. As she turned her head to take an ice, the old lady rose briskly and lost not a minute in making her way to the baronet, and



repeating to him what she had just heard, in her turn enlarging upon Miss Raymond's expression of pleasure, so as to give herself more excuse for the communication.

"There is a sweet young lady in the room, Sir Matthew, who lost her heart to you, a year ago, at the Exhibition: you *must* come with me and be re-introduced: such an interesting girl, a friend of one of the best families hereabouts. Oh! don't be too modest, you should have heard her tone of delight when first she recognized your face."

With such chatter, she accompanied him to the sofa where Helen was, and there he sat for the rest of the evening, detained by benevolent vanity on his part, and courteously worded satisfaction at seeing so kind a stranger again on hers. She was pleased to be engrossed with one who looked so comfortably old, and so unlikely to excite the imagination of Beatrice, if she noticed to whom she was talking.



His talk was in rather a stiff old-fashioned style, certainly; and there was a kind of swell of moral sentiment in his expressions, which she might have found fault with, if he had not listened to her with almost parental kindness, and taken some pains to rectify a false conclusion to which, as he said, some of her merry remarks tended. For her spirits rose to mirth now: the solemnity of his manner, when she told him that she thought evening parties only fit for the display of pretty dresses, and the perfecting of social endurance, amused her so much that she laughed outright; and begged to assure him that when she said a silly thing, she did not speak on oath, or feel prepared to justify it as a truth before a magistrate.

“Yet, my dear lady, *as* a magistrate, I must in my own person oppose the outset of error;”—at which she laughed still more, and looked so very charming, that for once he really enjoyed hearing her voice in preference to his own. He attended



her to the carriage door, and, with a profound bow, took leave.

“What a quaint-looking affair you had for your beau this evening, Helen,” said Beatrice as they drove off: and nothing more was said, for both were tired. The following day, however, Beatrice came before dinner to her husband’s room and said, smiling, “Helen did not waste her civilities much amiss last night, Percy! Mrs. Lorimer has been here,—calling with her sister (such a calamity for poor Helen, one of those odious Trouncer cousins!), and I asked her if she knew anything of a Sir Matthew Blinkhorn, just for something to say; and, wonderful to relate, she did, and told us all about him. It seems that he lost his wife at Panson, last summer, as they were going home; rapid consumption ending before the poor thing could finish her journey into —shire. So she was buried in Panson churchyard, and oddly enough, by Lorimer, for Mr. Black was away at the time.”



"Very good, my love, I'm sorry for him; but what this has to do with your friend, you have not yet explained."

"Men are so stupid! Why, he is just one of the richest commoners in England, and has a beautiful seat about eight miles from the coast. We must call upon those new people at Panson, of course, in a day or two, and we will leave a card for him. He came to superintend the putting up of his wife's monument."

"Do as you like, my dear."

"I declare, I think Helen rather liked the old oddity, from the way she speaks of him; and, if we could give her any pleasure to console her for her cousin's unexpected coming, I should be glad."

Esther's visit had been expected by the Lormers, but as Helen had been hindered from seeing them many days, and Mrs. Trouncer had lately written without mentioning it, her cousin's face had been a surprise, and not a very



agreeable one. However, she was for her, cordial and chatty; she had come to spend some weeks at Grailedge. Helen could not answer that she was sorry that she should be leaving for the seaside in ten days' time.

The proposed call on their neighbours at Panson was made, and the card left for Sir Matthew.

"Poor Sir Matthew!" said the lady of the house, "he is not in; he spends a good part of every afternoon in the churchyard. I wish anything could a little distract his thoughts from it."

He returned the call in three days' time, and made his a long one. Helen happened to be in the room, and he frequently appealed to her for an opinion with the comical formality which had amused her at first, and which again made her feel almost jocund by antagonism.

The mode in which people first affect us, generally decides the tone of after communications; and it was so in this instance. Helen, feeling



herself in no danger of being suspected of trying to attract, was quite at ease when conversing with Sir Matthew Blinkhorn; and the confidence of a refined nature and well-cultivated mind is necessarily attractive; together with her pensive beauty it completely fascinated the old baronet. He made every excuse he could for coming to Grailedge; called on the Lorimers—a visit of melancholy gratitude, as he assured Helen, when he ventured to look in at the Grange with a trifling message to her from one of the ladies at the rectory about a knitting receipt for babies' boots;—on which occasion he placed himself almost in the light of an old friend by happening to mention Mr. Heathcote as his much esteemed legal adviser. He had a closer clasp from Helen's delicate hand after their mutual acquaintance had been spoken of admiringly. Her cordial farewell was for the man who appreciated a dear old friend; but he thought it was for himself; and went away in cheerful spirits.



“Poor Mary! she would have wished it!” he thought, as he rode past the churchyard, where his wife’s body lay.

Two days later, Mr. Chadleigh was driving Beatrice and Helen homewards after a round of calls. They were to leave home the next morning.

“Drive round by Panson, if you do not object to a little delay, Percy. I have a curiosity to see poor Lady Blinkhorn’s monument. They say it is done in the most perfect taste: we have time; it is only a few minutes after five. We must forego our tea this afternoon, Helen; I hope you do not mind.”

“Oh, no. The day is perfect.”

When they reached the churchyard, the servant took the reins, and all three entered the lychgate. Several old yew trees grew on one side of the church; and planks with rubbish, heaps of mortar and stone lying by these trees, led them to the place where stonemasons had been



at work. As they came in sight of the tomb, Sir Matthew was seen leaning against the rails which surrounded it; his head bent forward, apparently in profound thought. Even a cabbage-garden looks beautiful and solemn in moonlight; and so did Sir Mathew's face—with all its pomposity—as he stood by his wife's grave.

The intrusive party were turning back, not liking to disturb him, when Mrs. Chadleigh's low tones made him look up. He hastened to them, begged them not to apologize, and said how much he would like their opinion of his monumental design. After a little discussion of subordinate details, Beatrice touched her husband's arm, and said she wanted to show him an inscription on the other side of the church, which she had only half read; and both turning away, they left Helen alone with the mourner.

"You had known the anguish of bereavement when I first saw you," he said, "when I little



thought that the hand of the Lord was about to be laid so heavily upon myself. You had felt the desolation of loneliness, I imagine, when you so sweetly accepted a stranger's care; may I be so bold as to ask if, since then, your life has been tolerably happy? Forgive the question from one who has mourned,—rather who mourns,—and tell me, dear Miss Raymond, *has* sunshine followed the storm?"

"Ah, no!" cried Helen, touched to forgetfulness of caution, "my life has been too sad, ever since, to bear talking of."

It was a time of fading floating leaves, and the air so still that one heard them rustle on the ground as the foot of the passer-by disturbed them; but not the faintest sounds reached them then; and Helen wished that some one would pass, or Sir Matthew Blinkhorn speak on any subject less affecting.

After a pause and a deep sigh, he did speak, in other accents, rapidly, incoherently, not of her lot



but his: of his lonely home, his unshared interests, his objectless life; and now, without any of his wonted stiff expressions; in the quick, low tones that people use about matters more important to the speaker's emotion than to the hearer's curiosity. And she listened to his confidential lamentations with the hurried imperfect hearing which very delicate minds give to such a disclosure; half-attending, as if it would be dishonourable treachery to take advantage of another person at a weak moment, by too well understanding what was said, nor did she altogether. Something escaped him which she heard with outer ears, and only began to see the full drift of hours afterwards, when she was wondering how he *would* have finished the sentence if the return of her companions had not cut it short. On reflection, it seemed that her ears must have mistaken, he hardly could mean *that*.

She had, however, caught scent of his drift enough for all practical purposes; enough to



make her ask if it was not time to go home, and so avoid the chilly air after sunset; enough to give a very perceptible coldness to her adieux, and a slight flush to her cheeks when Mr. Chadleigh turned round from the box with the laughing observation, that he hoped their poor friend had been a little consoled by their sympathy.

The remark was for his wife, but Helen gave it uncomfortable self-application. Her thoughts were not, however, long with Sir Matthew; for as they drove through Panson, who should they meet but Esther Trouncer and her brother-in-law.

They stopped to exchange a few words.

"A lovely evening, Miss Trouncer; we are quite sorry to be obliged to go home to dinner."

"Have you seen Lady Blinkhorn's monument, Mrs. Chadleigh?"

"Just come away from the churchyard. But do not let us detain you any longer. Good evening."



A minute's interview can bring back such a flood of associations! These burdened Helen's mind for the rest of the day. Esther's voice reminded her of so much.



## CHAPTER II.

"You see we are a timid people, and we fear anything unusual. We may be dull, but we are resolved to be gentleman-like."—ARTHUR HELPS.

THREE weeks in lodgings by the seaside, with very little diversity of employment to beguile the time, taught Helen more pity for vacant minds than she had ever felt before. Beatrice wanted such continual distraction from the emptiness of her own. To her, a thoughtful silence was burdensome; and if on wet days the novels of the circulating library at St. Leonards failed to interest her, Helen's office as a partner in monotonous leisure was no sinecure. Her friend expected her to be always cheerful and always amusing. She was heartily glad when the time came for their



return home, and it was hastened by Miss Ashcroft proposing to spend some weeks with her niece before winter set in.

“If Miss Raymond should still be with you, pray let me be kindly remembered.”

This was the postscript of her letter, and when it was shown to Helen, the sentence gave her pain.

“Your aunt will be surprised to find me still at the Grange, Beatrice; surely you would rather have her all to yourself,—let me go now she is coming.”

“The very reason you should stay. Pray do not concern yourself about what surprises her. If you once begin to be troubled by that, or I either, we shall have no peace. She is always surprising herself about something.”

Miss Ashcroft came, and when she found that Helen's time of departure was indefinitely postponed, she lost no occasion for allowing her wonder to escape. She was a woman who habitually spoke



with an ulterior object; either talking at people in smoothest accents, or to them with some purpose quite foreign to her more obvious meaning.

Helen, generally most accurate in her estimate of the depth of feeling from which those about her spoke, could detect indifference under any amount of verbal wrappings, and feel that lack of cordiality which politeness does its best to cover. There is such a thing as feeling real liking through a veil of seeming repugnance, and positive dislike through all the paddings of reputed friendship; and cold winds that reach us through hot sunshine are notoriously unpleasant.

Though Helen longed to find an old friend in the acquaintance of happier times, she could not conceal from herself that Miss Ashcroft spoke to her with constrained suavity, as if there was no spring of kindness in her heart, but only a strong resolve to keep up the appearance of goodwill. And she feared her a little, as a very ardent nature must fear one whose thorough poise of



mind and perfection of conventional propriety, rebukes all uncalled-for variations of thought and manner. However amiable or amusing originality might be, Miss Ashcroft disapproved of it as oddity, and gave it no countenance. Her opposition was tacit, but Helen perceived it, and attributed even the dryness of her manner to intention also; and thought Miss Ashcroft was bent on damping her sallies of wit. Very often, she was only impervious to a new idea, and shocked at anything out of the common way; and when made aware of her own deficiency in humour, contented herself by the conclusion, that there were women who had more often made themselves ridiculous.

Wounds, and deep ones, may be given to self-love so secretly that no observer, however watchful, can discover how they are made: and this was Miss Ashcroft's peculiar art. Except in her company, Helen never doubted that she had a kind of wit, and some originality of mind, but



finding these ignored, or treated as a positive disadvantage, she felt herself socially disabled. There is a dulness so finished and perfect in its own way, that it makes people who are gifted with more irregular powers feel ashamed of themselves, and quite at a loss beside it; and it is a quality which is very useful in society, for it harmonizes varying elements, honours inferiority, and supports a moderate standard, which the witty, the imprudent, and the genius often imperil.

But to Helen, this dull perfection was very wearing. Sometimes when she had been telling a pathetic story, and Miss Ashcroft had gone on making those little inarticulate sounds which are used to represent kind attention to a tedious recital; with rigid eyes, and a careful smoothing on of her ever-worn gloves, she felt as if she could almost stamp with impatience, and would end as abruptly as she could. "And oh," she thought, "what a complete tyranny there is in a commonplace character that prides itself on correctness.



All nature and imagination must be sacrificed to it, and however stupid, stale, and irksome may be the result, if this Moloch of English life is satisfied, it is enough!"

Sometimes, what with the insipidity of Beatrice and the stiff decorum of her aunt, Helen began to ask herself if she should not be as happy with her cousins; but a clear negative was always felt, for her present companions were thorough ladies, and therefore she insisted with herself on being grateful. Over and over again, she repeated that Beatrice was so extremely kind to her: she was, but this daily assertion proved that kindness more than sympathy was felt in their mutual relations.

As winter began to frown, she felt most depressingly the joylessness of the beginnings and endings of her days. No real touch of love in look or voice, either when strength was new, or when spirits and energy were flagging, no affectionate caress or endearing ridicule,—only the guarded ceremonials



of polite kindness. Though Beatrice never allowed her to feel that *she* found her in the way, it was often evident from her manner, after being alone with her aunt, that she was fresh from the influence of one who did,—that she was trying to reassure a visitor only too likely to think herself unwelcome.

Could a “poor governess” have felt more lonely than she often did, sitting by herself upstairs in long dreary afternoons, as much apart from human fellowship as the little sapling tree that stood up against the cold evening sky on the ridge of a snow-clad hill? For December had come in, wrapped in such heavy snows, that neither could she get out into the village, nor Miss Ashcroft return home.

One morning, a newspaper came directed to Helen, in hand-writing unknown to her. When she had looked through it in vain, to find out why it was sent and by whom, Beatrice took it up to search for the same purpose, and quickly gave it



back. "There, my dear, no doubt who sent it. Read the account of the dinner given to the tenantry at Drumchase."

Helen read a long speech to his tenants by Sir Matthew Blinkhorn; and not a bad one, excellent sentiments as to kindness and good sense, if the style was a little turgid;—well, newspaper reporters were often more answerable for that than speakers themselves. A trifle pleased her, (she did not ask herself why,) Sir Matthew had quoted a few couplets from *Crabbe's Parish Register*, which she had shown him as her favorites upon that topic.

She laid down the paper with an impenetrable smile, remarking that she wondered how such a bird of passage as Sir Matthew Blinkhorn should have remembered her address; and expressing a little amusement at a person caring to send his own speeches about. This was scarcely generous, for she well knew why he did; that in his speech he had touched on several subjects bearing upon the condition of the poor which had been discussed



between them; and that he had here and there incorporated her own ideas, as if convinced by them, on further consideration, himself.

Two letters went from the Grange that day, consequent upon the receipt of that dull county paper. Without saying a word about it to Helen, Beatrice got her husband to write and ask Sir Matthew to spend Christmas with them; and, by that mysterious process of human nature, which allows us to act upon a motive not yet come into consciousness, though as certainly efficient as the light of the sun before it touches the horizon, Helen wrote to Mrs. Lemayne, and begged her to let her know, without delay, how Arthur was going on, and whether she expected him home before long.

She extracted the quick reply she asked for. It was not without reason that Arthur used to say that his mother had "quite a taste for painful duties." She certainly discharged them with an alacrity hardly to be accounted for otherwise.



She was happy to be able to give a comfortable account of her absent son. Arthur had written to say that he was now happily engaged at Sydney, where he had taken a farm, and had, therefore, no thought of returning for many years. He had desired her to remember him kindly to all his cousins.

It is strange that a religious woman like Mrs. Lemayne could allow herself, for the gratification of pride, the unfair use of an ambiguous word. She meant that word *engaged* to convey a false impression, if Helen chose so to take it; fancying that she detected, in her letter of inquiry, the wish to recover old claims upon Arthur's affection. "It does not concern her," she thought, "whether the poor boy is going to be married, or only fully occupied with business: let the phrase stand for as much or as little as it may."

Who knows how great a ruin may be effected by the smallest breach of truth? On reading that cruel letter, a deadly chill came upon Helen's



nature. She had believed hope dead long before, but an intensity of love had hidden its secret vitality. And now that this death-blow had been dealt to love itself, she knew the terrible strength of both, and the amazing force of will by which their last convulsions may be concealed. Having been so often deluded by baseless hopes, she was now ready to accept with equal precipitation the worst suggestions of fear.



## CHAPTER III.

“For all is bright, and beauteous, and clear,  
And the meanest thing most precious and dear,  
When the magic of love is present.  
Love, that lends a sweetness and grace  
To the humblest spot and the plainest face.

\* \* \* \* \*

Love that sweetens sugarless tea,  
And makes contentment and joy agree  
With the coarsest boarding and bedding.”—T. HOOD.

“Mein armes Herz, wen nennst du dein ?”—KARL BECK.

Two days before Christmas, Helen was making her way to the rectory as fast as she could through the fog. Beatrice and her aunt were not inclined to face such unpleasant air, and she found their society that afternoon more dispiriting than the weather; and to escape from it, was glad of the excuse of wishing to take some Christmas presents to the little Lorimers. Not that anything annoying



had been said. Miss Ashcroft had certainly commented upon her own change of plans and protracted visit, in Helen's hearing, as upon something quite outrageous,—which nothing short of the wishes of a *relation* could justify; and soon after turned to her and said, with an affectionate smile, that she could not understand Mrs. Trouncer being able to consent to her absence at this season of family re-unions: she was sure it must be a great trial. But Helen was so used to inuendoes of this sort, that she had ceased to mind them, and Beatrice never heard her aunt say anything of the kind without taking the first opportunity of saying that she never wanted her more.

It was not this that had made their conversation dejecting, but a foolish spasm of chagrined self-love. They had been talking about Charles and his bride, because their wedding-tour had been longer than was at first intended: Miss Ashcroft could not welcome them to her house until the end of January. She dwelt much upon Charlie's



supreme happiness; his bride was not young, it is true, but the very woman best calculated to secure his happiness;—and her family so good,—such excellent people,—her father one of the most highly respected men,—and so on.

Even Beatrice had sympathy enough to remember that this part of the subject might call up painful associations of thought in Helen's mind, and did not willingly pursue it; but her aunt had not done with the bride's delightful qualities, and wished to tell them a few amusing traits of Charlie's entire devotion.

"I should say he had never before been thoroughly in love; though, of course, with a woman some years his senior, he would not show it in the same way."

"Hum," replied Beatrice, "be so kind as to give me the pattern that lies beside your work-basket. Are you really going out, dear Helen? I'm sure Mrs. Lorimer ought to be very much obliged to you."



Helen disliked herself with strong disdain that sombre afternoon. "Why was not she *only* glad to hear of the happiness of another?" she thought. Alas! who ever felt only glad to hear of a love quite changed; to feel self quite passed by and seemingly forgotten,—who ever *only* rejoiced to look at happiness through the eyes of another who, but a short time before, had no scheme of happiness unconnected with her? If such there be in this world of half-formed angels, they have less weakness than Helen had to teach them indulgence for others.

When she got into Mrs. Lorimer's dining-room, (only a fire there, unless a very fine day threatened callers,) the ice of selfish sorrows melted: so many pleased little faces to kiss; such a hearty hand-shaking from their quiet mother; such eagerness to keep her till baby was awake and could be brought down and exhibited, that she forgot her own lot in truest sympathy with theirs.

The carpet had been darned since she last sat on



the implacably hard horsehair couch, and Mrs. Lorimer was busy, mending some old fire-screens that her husband had used at college, and the children had picked the gold-edged paper from.

“You see we are doing our best to brighten up for Christmas! Laura, fetch Miss Raymond my list rug from papa’s study. He says it is as warm as anything he could have bought, and we all helped to make it: the children plaited it in the twilight, before we like to begin candles, and then I put it together.”

What pure happiness beamed on the good patient face of that homely woman! Through all the shabbiness of an impoverished lot, that love shone which is to be glorious in heaven; and, among all her harassing cares and pains, she wore the woman’s ennobling crown of humility and self-devotion. She was dreading Christmas bills, but more for her husband’s sake than her own, for when the children were about her, such troubles seemed light.



"I can wish you a merry Christmas, with some certainty of your having it," said Helen to her, on leaving the house.

"And you will be merry too, surely; I heard from the housekeeper, when she brought down Mrs. Chadleigh's beautiful supply of Christmas fare for the children, that you expect several guests to-morrow."

"Ah, yes! but I am a guest too?" Helen answered, stooping down once more to kiss Teddy, before the rising tears could fall.

Mrs. Lorimer scarcely took the meaning of her words, and as she went back to the window to finish her pasting work by the failing twilight, she wondered why Helen Raymond remained single.

And Helen, as she walked back, was wondering whether by any marriage she could now find peace. It was almost the first time that she had put the question distinctly to herself.

A dense cold fog occupied all the near ground, and beyond it stretched the gaunt skeleton trees,



moveless and bare. A few rooks had perched on their highest branches, come there, apparently, to see if from thence they could descry any object of hope to cheer the monotony of their disconsolate prospect. But the shrouded sun set, there was none seen, and all winged creatures fled away to chilly rest.

When Helen came into the drawing-room dressed for dinner, Beatrice met her with a laughing eye, and an open letter in her hand.

"Who do you think we are to have for our guest, next week? Percy got the letter by the late post. Don't you know the handwriting? Oh, Helen, how ungrateful! Poor Sir Matthew! and was his newspaper direction quite thrown away?"

"Into the fire, no doubt."

"Well, but you really must be a *little* civil to him, my dear; first, from compassion, and then because he says such exceedingly flattering things about us all, that——"



The door opened slowly for Miss Ashcroft's slow sweeping velvet dress, and Beatrice turned the subject by asking if Helen found the Rectory party all quite well.

But enough had been said. The idea that Sir Matthew Blinkhorn felt something like a *tendresse* for her was lodged in her mind, and without giving conscious attention to this idea, it certainly sweetened the next day. The least touch of a subtle essence like love will flavour whole days with pleasure; so subtle is it, that sometimes it can hardly be discerned when it really exists; it is therefore not unfrequently imagined when it does not. Had Helen the faintest trace of love for Sir Matthew in her feelings now? If she had, it was quite unknown to herself. But love as naturally follows the image of those who give us pleasure, as green grass tracks the course of running streams.



## CHAPTER IV.

"Whom first we love, you know, we seldom wed,  
Time rules us all, and life, indeed, is not  
The thing we planned it out, ere hope was dead,  
And then, we women cannot choose our lot."

OWEN MEREDITH.

"Dann wird die Vergangenheit näher an mich treten, und fast  
mehr lächeln und weinen als sonst und sagen : ich bleibe bei dir."  
—JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

It was a fortnight later that Helen went up at night to a bedroom already showing signs of near departure ; packing-boxes stood in it, nearly filled ; and the shelf which had held her books was empty. She had passed the evening with much calmness as far as outward manner goes, but any one who was gifted with penetration, might have perceived in this composure the



defying firmness of nerves kept in order by a mind that scorned its own agitation.

"Then you are really inexorable, and mean to leave us?" asked Mr. Chadleigh, when she wished him good-night.

"The day after to-morrow."

"Miss Raymond does not know the pain she will inflict," said Sir Matthew, in an under tone; but as his sorrowful glance came to her through spectacles, it was not more moving than his courteous formula of regret. After she had lain down some minutes, Beatrice tapped at her door.

"May I come in for a little talk, Helen? If you are not going to sleep that is,—we can never find a quiet moment by day with the house so full."

"Oh, come in. I am not near sleep."

"I want, dear Helen,—if you will allow a real friend to speak on such a subject,—I want to give you my *earnest* advice on a subject most important to your happiness. Will you give me leave?"

"Oh yes; I know you mean kindly."



"And not contradict me in a pet?"

"I am much too tired to be angry, and I will try not to contradict."

The dying fire wanted a great deal of judicious stirring and putting together, or Beatrice felt at a loss to begin her exordium, for Helen watched her picking up first a little knob of coal, and then a glowing cinder, several instants, before she said,—

"I am all attention, Beatrice."

"You said last night, remember, that you were determined to go—not from any observation of my poor aunt's—and I do believe you know her and me too well to be influenced by anything *she* might say about what is our concern, not hers; and then, if I took your meaning aright, you dropped a hint to this effect, that for your *own* sake you must leave,—as a measure of self-preservation?"

"I did say so: it is the only way of escaping all temptation to commit a great folly."



"Because Sir Matthew stays?"

"Yes."

"That, dearest Helen, is the very point I want to come to. Why will you call that a folly which we all think just the most sensible thing you could possibly do? It is evident that he is 'head and ears in love' with you,—that he has been dodging you about for the last few days in hopes of a fitting opportunity for proposing."

"Do you really think so?" said Helen, raising herself a little on her elbow.

"I am sure of it; he would have spoken long ago, if you had not been so austere reserved and distancing ever since he got here."

"I wished to be so."

"But why? what objection have you to the poor man? he's quaint and old-fashioned I allow, but a perfect gentleman. Let me tell you, that there is hardly one girl in a hundred who would not be extremely flattered by such a conquest."

No reply from Helen; and the cheerful sputter



of a little jet of gas in the coal was the only sound that broke through midnight silence. Beatrice had put out her candle before she sat down, but a momentary blaze from the revived fire lit up the room, and she could see that Helen listened attentively, and had no look of sleepiness in her soft eyes.

"At any rate," she continued after the pause, "you will not deny that you like him?"

"In a kind of way, I certainly do. He has been very, very kind to me; and his being so much older than myself has perhaps made me too little on my guard. I *do* like him, but, oh! Beatrice, not in *the* way."

"Oh, my dear, if every one waited for *that*, who would ever marry?"

In the tone of that exclamation, Beatrice revealed to her friend what had been unsuspected before, and Helen gazed at her with curious interest. Was it possible? could that comfortable *embonpoint* figure have been ever shaken



by a sob? Had *she* ever felt the consuming fever of an unsatisfied affection?

"Rely upon it," she continued, "hardly one woman in a hundred marries the person whom she has thought at one time the only person she ever *could* marry—or love. We learn to love those who love us."

"And those who love us—passionately, at one time,—unlearn—" Helen began, and stopped short, sighing heavily.

"Exactly so—unless we marry them. That is the only chance of keeping love alive. It soon goes otherwise."

"Oh! do not say anything so terrible. Surely *some* hearts are less fickle; *some* go on loving, however long they are separated——"

"In story-books; but not in real life—at least, not men."

The words of her friend fell back upon the heart of Helen like an oracle of fate, because they so positively expressed the mournful results of



her own experience. She was weary of love; it had proved in her case, as she now thought, such bitter deception. What had long years of constancy done for her? what all the slow torture of its patient hope? "No more of that!" she had said to herself: and from that moment marriage with another had seemed just *possible* to her. Feeling quite tired of romantic sentimentalism—and Arthur's love seemed now nothing better, she could listen to a project for some consoling reality. The once bright picture of her own self and her own life had been fading week by week; every day had seemed to dim its colours; and now, when the idea of her becoming the wife of Sir Matthew had gained the distinctness of outspoken words, the last remaining tints of beautiful romance vanished, and she could see within nothing but a confused outline of her former self—

Frequent tears had run

The colour from *her* life; \*

\* Mrs. Browning.



hence she could listen patiently as Beatrice went on.

"Setting aside all school-girl notions of poetic bliss, I think if you ever mean to have a house and position of your own, you will be extremely unwise to let such a chance as this go by. Do you not see the singular advantages of such a match? Why, Sir Matthew is one of the most influential men in —shire, and very rich."

"But, Beatrice, that would not profit me much if he fails to influence me!"

"Oh, my dear, what does that matter if with him *your* influence is unbounded? And you see he worships you. If I were you I would never trouble myself with any absurd notions of that sort."

"My notions of a wife's happiness do not then agree with yours. I never wanted to be worshipped; but to admire and respect I do need—oh, so much!"

Having got into a very comfortable attitude on



the couch by the fire, Beatrice, heedless of this last assertion, prolonged her admonitions with continuous emphasis: speaking confidently, as if empowered by a special commission from Heaven to disregard all those mandates of wisdom by which women are forbidden to accept as a commodity the husbands their heart does not choose.

Helen had just met her remark, "Besides, how was it in former times, when girls had no voice in the matter, but married whoever their parents chose?" by saying, "*That* is no proof, even if it could be shown that they *were* happy, when so married; they had not our nineteenth century natures,"—when the time-piece interrupted her by its silvery stroke for half-past one, and muttering "nor its fine-spun nonsense!" Beatrice hastily rose. She kissed her friend's forehead, with unusual warmth, and said, as her hand was on the door,—

"Remember, if you will only consent, you might be married from here, and never go back



to live with those dreadful Trouncers. Good-night, dear !”

The thought broke upon Helen suddenly,—flashed in like light,—a wild hope of immediate escape : that was all ; there was no love, and that ecstasy of longing for release roused a tumultuous crowd of wishes, of the existence of which she had hardly before been aware, so carefully did resignation seal them in darkness, up till this moment.

Until now, she had not dared to listen to the outcry of her own nature. Now she did. It was shrieking for liberty : it was telling her in a second of time all the horror and loathing of her present lot, which for nineteen weary months she had endured. At a glance she saw how hateful her so-called home was, how entirely forced her acceptance of it had been, how deeply it wronged her nature. And now there was an opening of escape ; love and another life offered. Did it so much matter whether he who offered it was congenial ? If she could *at all* like him, it was, she



thought, enough; and so, springing up with passionate movement, she flung her clasped hands above her in the darkness, and a short and vehement prayer thrilled through her whole being. "*My God! let it be!*" For two hours after, every pulse throbbed with such strong excitement, that she could not sleep. Calm deliberation was equally impossible.

The cold light of a January morning, creeping in through frost-dimmed panes and white blinds, did not waken her very cheerfully when the servant came in to open the shutters and light the fire. What had happened since she fell asleep; what had so completely changed her mood?

A dream,—a broken fragment of a night vision. All she could recollect of its impressive imagery was this, that as she was walking up the rose avenue at Fernwick, gathering roses, she heard Mercy and Arthur talking just behind her: that on hearing him say very sadly, "*I never meant it!*" she turned her head, and saw him tearing



a letter to pieces ; but as she looked and tried to catch his eye, the face became her father's, and the whole scene confused. Nevertheless, the impression left upon her troubled mind was clear. The words of Arthur were in themselves sufficiently pointless, but as it often happens in a dream, they seemed loaded with mysterious weight : they convinced her that Arthur loved her still, and that she could not accept Sir Matthew.

They met at breakfast,—she pale and serene ; he, as usual, whiffing in vivacity when animated by hope ; but in his more quiescent moments rather pompous. She tried to establish more distant rapports ; but it was next to impossible. He had discovered so many avenues to her confidence ; had told her so much about what he was doing for his tenantry at Drumchase, in consequence of her suggestions, and now brought her, after breakfast, a set of plans for new cottages which his builder had sent by that morning's post, and begged her to help him to choose.



He was too much of the gentleman of the old school to embarrass her with importunate attentions, and the fatherly carefulness of his, was more attaching than any compliments could have been. So much kindness at a time when long despondance had unnerved her, it was difficult to meet with indifference, and feeling shaken by her efforts to assume it without unkindness, she was aware of more smiling, more compliance, and more gratitude than she at all meant to show.

A few minutes before luncheon, some of the ladies who had been with them in the drawing-room dispersed, and Beatrice slipped away into the conservatory;—in sight, but quite out of hearing, just as, Helen was relating to Sir Matthew a pathetic incident she had witnessed in a crowded cottage near Fernwick. All at once she felt that he was attending more to her face than to her narrative; and blushing deeply to her own great annoyance, she brought it to an abrupt close.



Sir Matthew seized the opportunity, and was for once brief in his eloquence.

"No, no, indeed I cannot. It *must* not be."

Helen answered low. "I have not a free heart to return your kind feelings with."

"Mrs. Chadleigh assured me that you were not engaged, or I should not have presumed to subject you to the annoyance of my suit."

"Not engaged! oh no! But it is difficult to feel quite cured of an old folly,—you understand. No one is to blame about it; it is only that I cannot forget."

"Ah, dear Miss Raymond, do not on these grounds reject me altogether. If the objection does not lie in my unworthiness, let me hope still; let me entreat you to re-consider the subject. In a week, or even two weeks, let me have your answer; I would not ungenerously hurry so tender a spirit, but I cannot accept to-day's answer as final."

"Luncheon's on the table," said a stiff-backed



powdered butler, sonorously, opening the noiseless door, and waiting to titter till it closed behind him; for Mrs. Chadleigh's maid had said all along how it would be.

"You will write and give me a more deliberate answer within a fortnight? You will have *some* pity on your bereaved friend, will you not?"

"It would be pitiless to give you a half-broken heart."

"Nay, but I think I could do something for it."

Beatrice stepped back into the room as soon as her ear caught a more cheerful tone from Sir Matthew, looking delightfully ignorant, and asking if luncheon was yet announced. The rest of the party soon joined them; and from that hour till she was on her way home the following morning, Helen contrived to avoid anything like a *tête-à-tête* with Sir Matthew Blinkhorn.



## CHAPTER V.

"Le vulgaire et l'ennuyeux ! toute la mythologie des païens grossiers n'a rien imaginé de plus subtil et de plus effrayant. Ils se ressemblent beaucoup, en ce que l'un et l'autre ils sont laids, plats et pâles, quoique multifformes, et qu'ils donnent de la vie des idées à vous en dégoûter des le premier jour où l'on y met le pied. . . . Ils ont fait plus de victimes à eux deux que beaucoup de passions soi-disantes mortelles ; je connais leurs habitudes homicides, et j'en ai peur."—DOMINIQUE.

"Elle parcourut d'un regard l'intérieur de cette chambre où elle avait déjà passé tant de jours mornes, languissants, inutiles, et tout à coup elle se sentit comme écrasée par un horrible ennui, par un sombre dégoût de tout ce qui l'environnait."—  
M<sup>D</sup>E. CHARLES REYBAND.

For the satisfaction of her high sense of honour, Helen left the Grange, but it was at the sacrifice of all other inclinations that she did so. All that was specious in her nature said, "Stay, and consent !" only the deep inner voice whispered commandingly, "Go, and refuse." So she went.



She returned to her house of bondage and to all its less seductive temptations with the courage of a good conscience. But the exactest fulfilment of duty cannot always lessen the pain it costs. Her bodily senses complained; the rooms seemed smaller and closer than ever; the walls appeared to thrust themselves forward to oppress her. It took many days for her eye to get again used to such a house, to find its right focus of vision. At every turn and corner she met those old associations of pain and chagrin which only lose their sting in the soothing successions of daily habit; when they have been forgotten for a time at a distance, how poignant is the smart of their return!

The spectres of the past—the most tyrannical spirits of evil that haunt the present—hurry forward to meet the newly-arrived, and by them they are seen as they are seen by no one else. Usage wraps us in a stupifying element; our faults and those of our neighbours; our interests



and theirs; our little pleasures and theirs, mix and react, and confuse or blunt perception. At first it is far otherwise.

Helen found herself more warmly welcomed than she had expected to be, and was grateful for it; but she found all her old difficulties—privileged presumption and unconscious ignorance—dealing stupid blows right and left at every new idea; questioning every unexperienced or previously unheard-of fact; and want of urbanity foiling her at every turn by its rough disregard of everything not absolutely essential. She felt that to save her own politeness from the flaw of peevish retort or contemptuous silence, she must provide a *show* of civility both in her companions and herself; she must not hear some expressions, and yet must assume that others, indispensable to good manners, *had* been said, though inaudibly. It was playing double dummy with a sore heart and weary head, and when evening brought the irksome process to a close,



she felt as much exhausted as if she had been mesmerizing.

And then the stale levity of the unaired minds around her! their slow, fumbling apprehension of any new idea! their impatience of any departure from the ordinary track! the loose indistinctness of their thoughts, never kept in order by sufficient pressure from without, never tense with full stretch of mental exertion! All this, after months of intercourse with ever-changing society, of a more refined caste and higher calibre than any to which the Trouncers had access, was indescribably distasteful.

And then their jokes! The joke of an unpleasing companion is surely the quintessence of all that is repugnant to fastidiousness: it claims a gay sympathy, it finds an almost loathing ear; and, probably, the joker, mistaking gravity for depression of another sort, reiterates his or her pleasantries with the well-meaning wish to cheer, till the ill-humour of the hearer is wrought up



to an explosive pitch, and seizes upon some slight pretext of vexation to account for much deeper chagrin than can ever be explained. (Let no one hope to cheer with merriment one whom they fail to please in graver moments: taste feels a continuous aversion when habitually wounded, and cannot relish wit where day after day it suffers.)

Mr. Trouncer never guessed the pain he inflicted by his usual slow preparation of the pinch of snuff he was going to take, or by his deliberate shaking about of the unvaried yellow pocket-handkerchief. He had used the same gestures for years, and all the months Helen had been away; but to her now they seemed a new injury, a new disgust; like his daughter's old tricks of expression, which were still hanging about in the family circle unchanged—just as scents linger and get fixed in corners seldom visited by fresh air.

But Helen laboured to seem cheerful, and would



not allow herself to make comparisons; to recall Mr. Chadleigh's quiet gentlemanly intelligence when Edwin was talking slang, or winking knowingly, in her presence; or to remember Sir Matthew's courtly devotedness when her uncle was bidding her feel "quite at home," with a jovial voice and almost a slap on the back.

She had determined to do what she thought right, and strove to do it thoroughly. Her kindness to the Lorimers had not been without a good effect on Jane's sisters, and they really did their best to return it. But they had not the faintest conception of her present struggles—indeed, they thought her quite in high spirits:—she was less silent, and often laughed. Yes, she laughed with forced excess whenever she laughed at all; as those do who are so seldom exhilarated that they are pleased to find themselves laughing, and try to keep up the semblance of light-heartedness as long as they can.



After a few days, she heard from Beatrice. Sir Matthew was not gone; he was apparently in deep dejection, and went to Panson churchyard daily; would not Helen relent? If she could only see his face, morning after morning, when the post came in and brought no letters from her!

Relent? Ah! she had found out during the last week that her *feelings* were only too yielding, that she was but too ready to cancel her previous decision. There was something in seeing again all the insensate things which her eyes had rested on while brooding over dear hopes—now dead—that urged her to a resentful acceptance of less exalted pleasure. Sir Matthew's kindness was missed every day; every hour, gratitude remembered his love, and called it kindness, that thus it might be more frequently remembered.

But to-day she would not remember it. Having burned the letter as hastily as she wished to dismiss the train of ideas it had called up, she set herself to study diligently. She read much



that day, with avidity, trying to let all her sorrows and perplexities drown in a deeper sea of thought. And, in a measure, she succeeded; but, while she did so, there was present with her a dreary sense of self-mutilation; a known deafness to the outcries of the heart; a bitter feeling of distance from the real and more natural purposes of life, which made this brain tyranny to be abhorred. And yet then it seemed her only resource, for she dared not encounter her inmost thoughts, lest among them she should find a majority of traitors to true love. She did hear muttering suggestions: was she not *again* fooled by hope to have been influenced by an empty dream, while Arthur was made happy by another? Why should she not try to be less unhappy too?

“I thought the worst was simple misery!” she said to herself, quoting Keats; “simple unhappiness was far easier to endure than this terrible complication of feeling; this dependence



of another person, and an unhappy person too, on my, perhaps, mistaken notions of duty."

She held all that day a sheer cold heartache; not what poetry could soothe or tears relieve: a pain that had no words to call itself by; a deep unrest which made a spot of sun-setting light on the old church-wall look infinitely remote from her experience, as far off in its soft peace as Heaven itself could be.

The following morning, there was an iron frost and no ray of sunshine—a smarting keenness of cold which entered into combination with every thought and feeling, making the least annoyance harder to bear than usual. A day when the tongs or shovel always came to hand first when the poker was wanted; a day when everything and everybody looked marvellously ugly, and hands and feet were aching with cold—so, too, was Helen's heart. As she cowered over the dining-room fire after breakfast, glad to be alone a few minutes, and, therefore, delaying to follow her



cousins, the notes of a duet broke out from the adjoining room; the briskly-played petulant notes of a gaiety that seemed harsh in its frivolous strength, and only expressive of animal emotion. The sound made her inmost being writhe. Those duets had been new to her in the spring of the previous year, and all its most bitter associations had been involved in their giddy harmonies; she had heard them while first becoming aware of her utter desolation; and now, whilst every chord jarred her with acute pain, she suddenly resolved to accept a home of her own. Sir Matthew's last entreaty came back to her like light into a dungeon; such as it was, she would go towards it. The notes that danced in that ray of light, cold and narrow as it was, were these; a house of her own; money for giving away, and plenty of books; a husband to please, and to protect her from the anguish of loneliness, and complete freedom from the almost intolerable annoyance of living here.



An unhappy person is necessarily in some degree a blind one; hence Helen came to think *this* her only chance of escape—Sir Matthew the only person likely to love and marry her. She went up to her own room; no restoring influence there to break the infatuating spell of despondency! No sound or motion within or without the frost-stamped panes, where, slowly melting in the faint warmth of a hidden sun, drop after drop slid down with noiseless haste.

She had now that dim consciousness of misjudgment which frequently precipitates action. She would not pause to reconsider her present impulse, lest, by so doing, she should consign herself to prolonged endurance of the yoke she *had* groaned under. She wrote a few hurried lines in acceptance of another—for aught she knew a heavier, yoke—telling the exact truth; her heart's love could never be given again; such as gratitude and attention to all the duties of a wife could secure, was all she could promise. It



was not worth having, and many another would, she was sure, be more likely to make him happy ; but if he still felt as he did, she would no longer refuse.

Flushed, and hurried, and unpausing, she sealed her letter and went out with it to post it herself. (Arabella was having holidays during Edwin's vacation.) The cold world seemed dead asleep, and only the restless glitter of a rushy pond which she passed, showed that the frost was breaking, and a breath of wind beginning to stir.

She was so puzzled and surprised at herself as she came through the village after posting the fateful despatch, that her eyes rested with a painful sort of curiosity on any simple object that could represent peace. A white cat asleep on a bench by a cottage door ; a little girl in clean lilac print coming across the green, struck her with envy ; she so longed to feel, to be, to think anything simply and harmoniously : for one



admitted discord had thrown her whole nature out of tune.

She read and worked and talked during the rest of that day as sedulously as was her wont, but her mind only gave just as much attention to these processes as was needful for pushing them forward externally; her real self was far otherwise employed,—oh, how tormentingly! A chaos of regret, self-contempt, indignation and hope was seething within: prayer seemed impossible. She had done what she disapproved, and silenced her inward monitor; and yet she was glad she had so done.

Is it an uncommon thing for a disappointed woman to feel something of a cold resolve that, since the pure joy for which she thirsted is denied, she will stoop to the shallow puddles of a dreary highway, and call that refreshment?



## CHAPTER VI.

"I have had so little happiness as yet beneath the sun;  
I have called the shadow sunshine, and the merest frosty moon-  
shine,  
I have, weeping, bless'd the Lord for, as if daylight had begun."

D. MULOCH.

"Dabei hatte ich jedoch leider meiner vorigen zustand nicht vergessen. Ich empfand in mir einen masstab voriger Grösse, welches mich unruhig und unglücklich machte. Nun begriff ich zum erstenmal, was die Philosophien unter ihren Idealen verstehen möchten, wodurch die Menschen so geguält seyn sollen."

GOETHE.

So Helen was engaged to Sir Matthew. A day after he got her letter, he reached Mr. Trouncer's; he heard from her own lips the story of her attachment to Arthur; the quiet, hopeless assurance that she could never so love another; the mournful question—"Can you care for anything so cold and faint-hearted as I now feel?" He heard it all, but as one who hears language, and does not know its meaning. He was over-



joyed to have won her consent, and never doubted that he could make her happy. Great love and temperamental conceit combined to make him sanguine, and to hide from him all the risks of the enterprise.

They were engaged to each other, and during the four days he spent with her (for he had taken lodgings in the village), his exhilaration gave almost a boyish tone to his spirits; it lowered hers, though she was glad to be able to make any one so happy; it was easier to attach herself to a grave elder than to a sprightly one.

"Pray do not ask me to call you anything but Sir Matthew," she said to him the morning before he left; "do what I will, I cannot feel a more familiar name natural. Oh! I'm so afraid I shall disappoint you; sorrow has made me feel quite stony."

"My sweet girl will not say so, when once she finds herself in her nest at Drumchase."

"Shall I make you the sort of purse you have



been used to, or another kind?" asked Helen, wishing to rid herself of the burden of his gaze; and possibly a little inclined to make him recollect that for him as well as for her this was a second heart affair.

"Whatever you do will charm me."

Helen's eyes were fixed on some wood sparkling on the hearth, and not a feature lightened as he said this.

"And, my dearest Helen, you will let me hear from you every morning till April comes, will you not?"

"Every day! oh, but what can I write about? please excuse me *that*. I never could find anything to say more than once or twice a week. You are not angry with me for saying so? You know I cannot pretend anything with one who has been so very, very kind."

The gentleness of her voice, and the confiding way in which she slid her hand into his, while saying this, quite made up to him for the chilling



purport of her words. But with the best intentions she found herself unable to return all his fond looks affectionately. Standing at the hall-door after his adieux, she listlessly observed the dance of dry leaves which was going on in the courtyard. The weather had changed under the breath of a soft west wind; gently ruffling here and there, it stirred the poplar leaves which had drifted under the courtyard fence, and revived a touch of their delicate fragrance in decay.

The transient scent acted on Helen's unconscious mind, and drew it back by a long train of association to an autumn of early life. She saw herself and Mercy in little white frocks chasing the sear leaves down the beech avenue at Fernwick, and Arthur meeting her from behind a tree with a clasp of roguish empire.

Arthur! Arthur! had the name become strange to her that she repeated it to herself once and again? Strange? ah! no; *would* that it were! But she had done with him, as well as with



the childish clothing and childish glee. She was nothing to him now. She—Sir Matthew Blinkhorn's *fiancée*; and he had taken off his glasses to kiss her, and his fidgeting grey eyes had looked long on her face before he rode off. But, Arthur, your gaze could bring a rosy tint to those delicately rounded cheeks, and his seemed to make them paler than before; and though he was still in sight, slowly riding down the road, she had not looked after him, but still watched the heedless leaves whirling to and fro in their old fashion of bewildered joy in death; even memory could not give her now a tear.

Helen's engagement greatly increased her popularity with the Trouncers. Apart from the fact of its disposing of her in such a highly satisfactory manner, and making so gratifying a topic for public mention, it drew them into kindlier sympathy by putting her feelings more within reach of their intelligence. Every one in the house could appreciate the advantages of being



about to marry one of the richest men in England ; with a fine mansion and a title: for with those who only judge of a marriage from without, character appears a secondary consideration. And even as to character, was not Helen most fortunate? A man of strict probity, a perfect gentleman, a staunch Conservative, a sound Churchman,—what more could she desire? She was a clever woman, undoubtedly, to have made such a good match, and just the sort of person to adorn a high position. Sir Matthew's taste was applauded, and his disinterestedness no less so; who but a high-minded man would have wooed a portionless beauty, when half the girls in England would have had him?

So Mrs. Trouncer argued. You may often see in the mind of one individual all the elements of mob feeling;—applause of prosperity, contempt and rudeness for one who sinks in adverse circumstances. Helen now saw the one, for months she had felt the other. It did not raise her



esteem for human nature in the abstract; but from whatever source it springs, kind attention is pleasant.

From her friends at a distance she got the warmest congratulations. Beatrice was delighted; she now really loved Helen: it was acting on her advice with such real good sense,—so pleased was she with her, that in the glow of her satisfaction she stepped down to the rectory and made some excuse for giving the four eldest children half a sovereign each,—just for love of Helen as she told her husband, when going with him into consultation about their wedding present.

Miss Ashcroft wrote in a strain of motherly cordiality; she had always felt sure that Helen was destined to move again in her natural social sphere, &c. Helen had scarcely patience to finish reading the letter.

Mr. Heathcote's was the one that pleased her best; he spoke so highly of Sir Matthew, and was so perfectly satisfied that she would secure her



happiness by uniting herself to him. He and Mrs. Heathcote particularly desired that she should come and stay with them for a few weeks before April;—they thought it would be convenient for her to do so while seeing about her *trousseaux*. And with this letter came one from Sir Matthew, urging her to come next week to town, where he was going to choose furniture for her morning room, and he wished to do nothing without her co-operation.

It was on one of February's first warm days that these three letters came, and Helen, as soon as breakfast was over, had taken them out with her to re-read in the sunny fields. So still it was above, that a light cloud seemed to sleep on the horizon; so calm below, that everything far and near looked too much at peace to move quickly; and the daisies' wide-spread eyes and the ever restless sparrows seemed the only vigilant beings in nature: all else, steeped in sunshine and balmy air, slept lightly—dreaming that summer



was close at hand. Would it be summer indeed with her?

She stood and gazed on the strange possibilities of human life,—wonderstruck at all now befalling her own:—perplexed, half-terrified, half-pleased, hurried forward she knew not whither in an untried course. She wanted to disentangle her impressions, to form some idea of her future lot, to analyze and so to pacify some of the new emotions startled into her nature by recent events.

But there was no time now for such musing; life pressed hard upon her; its apparent calm regularity was a deceit; and though sheep nibbled the tender grass beside her, and cows were cropping their food all round with serious faces and slow steps, there was no leisure for peaceful meditation. She must be up and doing,—must answer Sir Matthew and Mr. Heathcote one way or another, and then be ready to go with her aunt to thank Mrs. Lacey for the beautiful inkstand she



had sent her the evening before. She accepted the invitation to the Heathcotes,—and in three days was plunged into a whirlpool of excitements. Something within made such distraction welcome.

For the time being, the confused voices of the world disturbed her judgment, and for the time she gave heed to its silly outcry against sentiment; to its bold asseveration that any man can be happy with a woman when once they are man and wife; that marriage in any way is better and happier for a woman than single life; that all women soon learn to love their husbands.

Poor creature! she tried to stifle her contrary convictions with the vague generalizing hearsays of society, and knew not that woe befalls any individual who rules the inner life by the authority of a mere generalization;—that anguish of heart is in every sense a particular, which refuses to be brought into common rules.



Had Arthur seen her now, he must have judged her as but another example of the heartless inconstancy of women, because no man could estimate the difficulties and temptations which had stung her into her present predicament. A man with his rough and obvious hardships cannot guess, as he battles with the outer world, what woman may be enduring behind her smiles and her easy gaiety at home;—the fine tortures of secret confusion, the delicate poignard strokes of envy and malice, the hourly trepidation which some phase of temper in her housemates may constantly produce;—he cannot imagine these, never being submitted to their influence; and, like all of us, he is apt to judge cruelly because he judges in ignorance.

That any one should interpret her course by worldly motives, never occurred to Helen: wealth and position had weighed so little in her secret counsels, compared to freedom and protecting love. Esther inadvertently opened her eyes.



Thoroughly intending to prove her kind feelings towards her a day or two after Helen's return from London, she blurted out this inapposite remark:—

“I always said that you *didn't* make up to Sir Matthew with any idea of marrying him; I always took your part; I don't believe you ever reminded him of having met at the Exhibition before with any thought of——”

She stopped abruptly. Helen's eyes were sternly bent upon her; if their softly-flashing blue could ever be accused of sternness, and dismayed by what was to her a new idea—opening a vista of most wretched misgivings, she repeated,

“Make up to Sir Matthew? *Make up* to him? Esther, I do not know what you are talking of, but nothing *I* understand.”

“Why, going to see his wife's grave,—that day I met you, you know—and praising his plans for improving the grounds at Drumchase, and all that sort of thing——”



Disgust is sometimes speechless. Helen felt a spasm of anger, and then a terrible heart-sinking as conscience cried out,—“If you are clear from the charge of this baseness, you can hardly be brave about all she might make; if she says anything about not loving him, so much as the hope of a home,—can you deny?” And at once her whole being seemed to prostrate itself in humble self-abhorrence, and she said with grave humility,—

“I am sorry any one thought me capable of such conduct as you speak of, Esther; but I am bad enough and weak enough to deserve any accusations. Please do not go on about this now, though; I would rather not hear more of what people say. You know we can only answer for our conduct to God; He has more pity for us all than we have for each other, and He knows everything.”

As April's second week drew near, Helen felt softened towards all that had formerly tried her patience. She had pity for her aunt's storms of



temper—no anger; she could pass lightly over Esther's moody fits; exchange jokes with her uncle; and feel a really affectionate interest in Matilda's concerns. These were in a hopeful condition, which had saved her from any access of envy. Mr. Tideman was of a teachable disposition; and it was becoming apparent that he shortly meant to propose. The fact of being about to leave a place for ever makes so great a difference. Not that this could make the Trouncers' home dear to Helen, but it softened the remembrance of an irrevocable past. The little garden, in its most graceful curve of beech tree or acacia, was hung with rags of envy and spite for her eye, and its grass-plot had been to her a valley of humiliation indeed; yet now it had a sort of charm for her mind. Afraid of the future, she loathed the past rather less; and even the fat cook, puffing in about butcher's and baker's messages, wore at this epoch some investiture of imaginative romance.



Her poor friends she was truly sorry to say good-by to. Going one day to take leave of several old women whom she had been in the habit of visiting, she listened to the exulting tone of their felicitations with a peculiar thrill of sorrow. Good hearts! so ready to sympathize; so proud of her prospects; so pleased to think of her as a great lady in a fine house; it all seemed to *them* so grand. But she was drooping under a load of perplexed feeling. What did this sudden picture in her imagination mean, of a hut near the diggings, the kettle boiling for Arthur's tea—Arthur's? But he was no longer hers; she, the promised wife of that correct strained old gentleman. Once more she plunged into a comparison of the two, with seeming attention to all old Susan Laycock was saying, whose ironing she watched meanwhile; her eyes followed each movement of the rough wrinkled hands, passing over the coarse volutes of her scantily frilled caps; dwelt on the much-patched shirts that hung beside the fire



(looking like an allotment ground in their many-sized patches); and at last fixed dreamily on the old Bible that lay on the shelf by the fire. She felt then, as if she would have given everything she was or had, to place herself in so simple and uncomplicated a sphere as this; all her laces and jewels, and knickknacks were so much lumber; she longed for rest, either on Arthur's broad shoulder, or in the quiet hiding grave.



## CHAPTER VII.

" Ah! tu non sai  
 Quel guerra di pensieri  
 Agita l'alma mia. Trovo per tutto  
 Qual che scoglio a temer. Scelgo, mi pento,  
 Poi d'essermi pentito  
 Mi ritorno a pentir. Mi stanco intanto  
 Nel lungo dubitar, tal che del male  
 Il ben più non distinguò. Al fin mi veggio,  
 Stretto dal tempo, e mi risolvo al peggio."—METASTASIO.

"In discourse you delight to speak too much, not to hear other men. You cloy your auditory when you would be observed; speech must be either sweet or short. . . . If sometimes you would, in your familiar discourse, hear others, and make election of such as know what they speak, you should know many of these tales you tell to be but ordinary; and many other things which you delight to repeat and serve in for novelties, to be but stale."—LORD BACON'S *Expostulation to the Lord Chief Justice Coke*.

DURING many an ugly day of desolation and neglect, Helen had said to herself that some one to love, some one to love her would have brought



back happiness; not such as she had once felt, but enough to quiet the heart. Love in the abstract offers unmixed sweetness; when with it comes all the limitation and alloy of human individuality, we find it no exception to other earthly blessings. It has its bitters even when mutually inspired—its terrors, when it lays claim to more than can be returned.

As her wedding-day drew near, these laid hold upon Helen; she was appalled at what she had done, and yet dared not confess, even to herself, how unprepared she felt to abide consequences—to bind herself for life to one whose letters already wearied her, if she read them: but to tell the truth, she often left sheets of affectionate monition unread, till she forgot to look at them again. Often would she complain to Sir Matthew, in hers, of depression and inability to wish for the tenth of April as he did; half hoping that he might take the unavoidable inference—offer her an opportunity of honourably breaking off the engagement;



but that never occurred to him. He only felt more impatient than ever to take the management of the dear girl's mind into his own immediate care; and, meanwhile, deluged her with advice which would have been good had it been applicable. By that singular law of human nature which makes pride or vanity always pitch their tents on the weakest side of character, Sir Matthew never took it into his head to fancy that Helen would be much a gainer by his wealth and position; it was by a partnership in his wisdom that he thought she would be so highly benefited.

A week before the wedding, after many restless nights and peaceless days, when the air was heavy with spring scents, and the breath of the sweet-briar loaded with memories of the past; the heavens low and dim, and soft clouds crossing over them with shape and colour as distinct as if they were live animals passing by,—Helen's distress of mind drove her to confession. She



wrote to Mr. Naseby, begging him, as an old clerical friend, to give her his best advice. With such misgivings and such absence of all strong feeling for the intended husband, was it right to marry? But she could not bring herself to speak of the old passion, and not giving her counsel sufficient data, she got from him an opinion he would never have given had he known all.

“It does not do,” he wrote, after preliminary expressions of sympathy, “to judge of any step you have deliberately taken by results: at least I know not at what period in their development it can be safely done. One so frequently mistakes a mid-way process for the end, and so may think that only harm is done, where by-and-by a far greater good is about to follow. Fancy what any one’s ignorant judgment of wine-making might be, if the liquor was tasted and pronounced upon when fermentation was incomplete. It may be something of the same sort that makes you now



so unhappy; a strong disturbance preceding a permanent composure."

And then he most wisely passed on to other themes, not pressing religious arguments of comfort, but rather pre-supposing them as already in force, though for a time not felt. He spared her much by this forbearance. At a time of intense anxiety, when heart and brain are torn by conflicting impulse, and can as little understand their own wishes as the external opposition that seems doomed to thwart dearest hopes, it is sometimes one's fate to be subject to a religious battering ram; to hear sacred truths hammered upon with vehement insistence, when it is morally impossible to give them due attention. The mind urged by the unseasonable importunacy of God's blind servant, feels as if it longed to overthrow all forms that came between its misery and its merciful Saviour. It longs for silence, at least, that it may lie low in the dust of humiliation, and pray with incoherent groans, for it knows not what



of mercy and forgiveness, even as it knows not the amount of its weakness or its sin. Oh! do not bring arguments or devout exhortations to one in this state, but the greatest pity and forbearance. Do not judge it, some sorrows are inexplicable; do not comment upon its agitation, some struggles it is pure agony to reveal.

Helen was reassured by Mr. Naseby's kind answer, and went through the duties of the ensuing week with more calmness than she expected.

When Sir Matthew came, he was shocked by the paleness of her face; it looked thin and worn, but from henceforward, he thought, there shall be no anxiety to worry her.

It was a pretty wedding;—for a small country place it was a gay one; and the beauty of the bride satisfied the expectation of all spectators. There were few who did not think her a fortunate woman with brilliant prospects, though the bridegroom looked uninteresting as far as personal appearance went. Yet as she passed through the



churchyard it was not the bunches of flowers on the pathway that caught her bewildered eye, but a row of little boys from the village, with grinning faces like turnip-lanterns. Stung by self-contempt, she felt as if even they were laughing at her and her venerable husband. For no one seems too insignificant to add a fresh load of shame to a heart self-condemned as deserving it.

But her vows were made, and from that hour the happiness of Sir Matthew must be more considered than her own.

Leave-taking at the Trouncers', was in the highest degree affectionate and demonstrative, all the more so from Mr. Tideman being now Matilda's accepted lover. Helen needed the two months of Continental travelling that followed, to take the taste of that closing scene out of her mind. Those months were in themselves enjoyable: constant change of scene protecting her from the risks of introspection. And, after her long experience of being "nobody," it is unde-



niable that the sense of being a very influential "somebody" was exhilarating. But, as her spirits rose, so did her expectations of what she might claim from life; and then she began to feel the constriction of the fetters to which she had submitted,

Her husband was dotingly fond of her, but he loved his own ideas of wisdom and propriety still more dearly; and to these her wishes were sacrificed with all the solemnity of a little nature.

Her comparative youth and total ignorance of the world, determined him to allow no equal fellowship. He deemed it his mission to repress the impulsiveness of her character, though it charmed him; to bend her conduct to the minute methods of his, though she often dared to laugh at them, with the merriment that hides surprise. Endless admonitions gradually silenced this, and there was some danger of surprise changing to contempt.

In social etiquette Sir Matthew was a pedant,



and appeared almost vain of his knowledge of what was the correct thing to do and to say on all occasions; and nothing annoyed him so much as the least failure in Helen's part of its precise performance. She, with her quick woman's wit, needed small acquaintance with life to see that this sort of punctilio was out of date, too onerous by far for the hurried modern mind, and in no way likely to produce the respect which was her poor husband's idol. Eager to save him from ridicule and herself from worry, she would try to make him understand this; assuring him that some of the little observances which he exacted were as obsolete as the high coat collars he might have worn in his youth. But she spoke in vain. To any notion of change in the manners of a gentleman he was impenetrable; and he would add such a wearisome harangue upon the mischief of democratic equalization, that Helen thought the most rabid demagogue could hardly have had a more severe punishment than hers



in being obliged to listen to it. His dulness of mind was the harder to endure from the careful politeness behind which he entrenched it, so making it impossible to hasten his perorations without absolute rudeness; and in dealing with him the least flaw of courtesy seemed doubly unpardonable because it ran counter to such a model of perfect decorum.

She had felt something of this before their marriage, and concluded that in closer relations his formality would wear off: but when on a moonlight night at Rome, as their carriage stopped in sight of the Coliseum, and she was darting forward, as soon as her foot touched the ground, he drew her back, saying,—

“Gently, my dear girl, gently; wait till I can give you an arm: Beppo is to bring the camp-stool;—nay, I am sorry to retain you thus long, but I must beg that you first put on the extra cloak which I had brought for you; you coughed twice in going to the Vatican.” Such



a quantity of stiff slow words, *then* and *there*, taught her that like all other habits, this formality of his was ingrain. Was she an undutiful wife, if by the time they reached Drumchase, she felt very tired of it?

The new home to which he brought her was beautiful. A mansion that for some centuries had stood in sequestered grandeur upon the noble domain of his ancestors. On one side, it was completely masked by extensive woods; on the other, well planted park ground, expanding at last into open downs, gave a view of the sea, which was about eight miles distant,—a glimpse of the blue line which cuts the aërial wall of our world with soft distinctness,—which the tumult of the air can alter, but nothing done on earth. Of all her new possessions, perhaps this pleased Helen best; and yet when first she saw it—when first a white sail gleamed faint on those few yards of horizon! Ah! had *he* crossed the waves to win her, what would she have cared for all this



burdensome wealth? But he had had no pity, and she too had done with love—let the sea moan on, it was now no means of rescue.

In one sense, more painful even than the deprivation of the present time, she had done with love. Arthur had receded from his old position in her esteem; and what she supposed had happened since he left England, took from her even the joys of memory: for now—seen by the cold light of after knowledge, all her old careless happiness appeared delusive and treacherous, raising false hopes, and preparing for most bitter reality. “So it is well,” she thought, “that I have set aside romance, and all that sort of love for ever. I can do my duty without it.”

To do her duty, was now her dearest ambition; but she still hoped to make it easier by gentle attempts at remodelling her husband's ways. She might just as well have tried to alter the growth of his centenarian oak trees. Often did the words of her friend Beatrice recur to



her, when wearied out by some silent struggle for submission. "At any rate, Helen, in marrying Sir Matthew, you run no *risk*. He is too negative a character for that, and will let you have your own way too much to be able to distress or pain you, as many a clever man might."

Oh! was it no distress to her to live with a small mind, a mind that was swollen to evident self-gratulation on the least flush of success, and hurried into fussiness on any pressure of business? Was it no pain, to be the constant companion of one whose chief delight was to go through the motions of being a public character? whose favourite amusement in the evening was to take up some printed papers of his own composing, about committees for public transactions, and read them aloud to her in a very sonorous voice, and with much needless emphasis?

And unfortunately he had a turn for declaiming, "spouting" as his young schoolboy half-brother



used to call it, when he told his companion in the stableyard that he had been "button-holed" in the dining-room full half an hour after his mare had been ordered to the door. And Sir Matthew's voice was thin and wiry, and in lieu of modulations it had jerks, coming in apparently only to break the monotony of one unpleasing sound by another. This was a natural defect, and a taste for silence would have been a mercy both to himself and his hearers. But he *would* hold forth much to his wife's chagrin.

A few days after their return home, an old woman had pulled some stakes from a hedge, and he would have as a magistrate to sit in judgment upon her: in the evening he stood by the window where Helen was luxuriating in the scents and sights of her beautiful new garden, with his hands folded behind him, and thus addressed her.

"I shall give the policeman fully to understand that I have no intention of frustrating the course of justice. I must insist on the most unshrinking



discharge of his duty as a public officer. I shall say, Wilkes, it is incumbent on you *thoroughly* to investigate this case, and then to come and make your deposition, in explicit terms, without subterfuge or reserve of any kind. Leniency *may* be carried too far: it may encroach upon justice, and endanger truth—do you follow me, my love?" he asked, seeing Helen take up her work before his exordium was finished.

"Oh, easily," she replied, glancing towards him with rueful pity, for she thought that even he must have some obscure notion of what a foolish pompous piece of work he was making. No such thing; he stood swelling with weak vain words; his poor little mind strutting about among legal intentions with perfect self-applause. His heart was betraying itself, and he was telling the only ear present that he was a fool. Helen groaned inwardly, and was glad that no one else heard him.

"Will you not read me a few more pages of



Alison before Hugh comes in to tea?" she asked.  
(Alison was Sir Matthew's favourite author.)  
She was very fond of getting him to read aloud  
to her: while so occupied he could not be saying  
any more silly things, and it gave her patience  
a rest.



## CHAPTER VIII.

“E una delle facoltà singolari ed incommunicabili della religione Cristiane, questa, di poter dare indirizzo e quiete a chiunque in quasi voglia congiuntare, a quasi voglia termine ricorra ad essa. Se al passato v'è rimedio, essa lo prescrivere, lo somministra, presta lume e vigore per metterlo in opera a qualunque costo; se non v'è, essa dà il modo di fare realmente e in effetto ciò che l'uomo dice in proverbio della necessità, virtù. Insegna a continuare con sapienza ciò che è stato intrapreso per leggerezza, piega l'animo ad abbracciare con propensione ciò che è stato imposta della prepotenza, e dà ad una elezione che fu temerario, ma che è irrevocabile, tutta la santità, tutto il consiglio, diciamo lo pur francamente, tutte le gioje della vocazione. E una via così fatto che da qualunque labirinto, da qualunque precipizio l'uomo capiti ad essa e vi si metta, può d'allora in poi camminare con sicurezza e di buon voglia.”—MANZONI.

HUGH BLINKHORN, Sir Matthew's only brother, the son of his father's second wife, had come to spend his midsummer holidays at Drumchase. In fact it was his home. When Helen heard that he was to come the day after her own first arrival,



she ventured to ask if this was an unalterable plan, if he could not pay a short visit somewhere else, and leave them a week alone, "just to settle down," she added, not liking to confess how little she relished the prospect of a schoolboy-visitor, when all would be new and strange. But her suggestion was rebuked. They had given the two first months of their married happiness to enjoyment, and now the claims of duty must be met without shrinking. As long as his life was spared, he hoped that neither his brother nor sister would ever find a reluctant welcome at Drumchase. The idea of an intermediate visit he passed over altogether, though in his last letter Hugh had spoken of wanting to accept several invitations before the holidays were over.

The truth was, Sir Matthew rarely yielded his will on any point, be it ever so small; and she seldom resisted. Concession was natural to her, as it is to most minds of great resource. Facts and outer events are comparatively unimportant to



those who have much within them; but if he had conceded his little obstinate intentions and fussy plans, there would have been but small possessions within for his holding; little more than the jewel of a clear conscience, and that sense of accurately knowing what was the right thing, which kept him so constantly rising on tiptoe within and without. His expression about neither brother nor sister ever wanting a welcome, hung heavily on the ear of his wife, and while she mused whether more was meant than met the ear (for Miss Blinkhorn had no settled home, to the best of her belief), Sir Matthew indulged without stint in a verbal exposition of brotherly virtues. He enlarged upon his own strong sense of duty, his fraternal affection, and thorough discharge of all that was due to the wishes of deceased parents. People have some compunction about tormenting us with their faults—with their virtues none whatever.

Hugh was of a nondescript age, not quite boy,



not quite man. Boy enough to like standing with his hands in his pockets, at gaze, beside Helen, while arranging her flower-glasses, or putting up a parcel of books; or to rush to the window of the hall to see the "turn-out" of any visitor; man enough to like to speak of his razors as if he had used them for years; and to feel huffed if he was asked to go and play with an awkward squad of younger lads who would not mix well with the rest of the company—one of those liers-in-wait of society who take effect upon their associates by mere silence, and the obvious restraint of considerable mental power. His eye fixed, his manner impassive and keenly perceptive, he used to sit beside Helen at table, making her feel uneasy, she hardly knew why; perhaps because she felt his force while he gave her no means of meeting it; but more still, because she dimly perceived that his silence was a cloak for contempt.

Having long ago taken his measure of Sir Matthew, a half-brother more than forty years



older than himself, he settled at once in schoolboy fashion that a young and beautiful woman could only have married him for money and a "ladyship." He despised her, therefore, before they met, and though not finding her what he expected—"an odious woman when she is married"—he could not trust her innocent face and frank unassuming manner. His prejudice was so strong, that he regarded both suspiciously, as wily instruments for gaining power. Hence his civility was barely enough to satisfy his brother's notions of what a gentleman owes to a lady, and, but for Helen's intercessions, he would have been subjected to many a half-hour of remonstrance.

One day, at luncheon, when Sir Matthew was absent, acting as magistrate in the neighbouring town, Helen sat with his brother, at a great loss for subjects of conversation. She had tried cricket, his dogs, the sprain of his favourite horse, and never got beyond monosyllabic answers, till, as they rose from table, she hazarded an expression



about her own delight in the gardens and conservatories of her new home.

"You cannot think how I revel in them after having had none of my own for three years!"

"I should think you about did," said Hugh with something very like a sneer in his tone; and as she turned from the window in surprise, he left the room, slamming the door intentionally.

Full utterance of feeling is seldom wanted; half a tone will often put us in possession of thoughts that find no wider outlet. It now flashed through Helen's mind that this angry boy disdained her; that he took it for granted that she married for the sake of her splendid establishment—the thought was agonizing to pride, and, worse still, there was in it a terrible shadow of the truth; for *love* of Sir Matthew she certainly had not married him. How, then, could she resent the boy's mistake? Who could she blame but herself? And yet—the other part of her nature cried out—*yet*, why should you blame such conduct? What



did constancy avail you? What was the good of your girlish faith in the permanence of love?

For since her days of glorious aspiration, she had been untrue to the principles by which it is nourished, and looking back to those she felt indignant with *them*, saying to herself that they had failed in life's test, that thus she might avoid bitter self-accusation. Hugh Blinkhorn could not have taunted her more cruelly than sometimes her own thoughts upbraided. At this moment, she felt so stung with shame, that but for the refuge of humility she would have been almost maddened. That refuge was still hers; she could not explain or justify herself to her fellow-creatures, but God knew all, and before Him she could confess her faithlessness. Human beings, she began to see, must suspect her of a sin more vile in their eyes; but this she must learn to endure as one of the many correctives of a greater sin against God. Distrusting His Providence she had done evil that good (her idea of good) might come, and



Heaven had answered her according to her folly, with the penetrating retributions of Divine government.

Only a few weeks after her marriage, she heard from Mercy that Norman's regiment was ordered home; "and then," she said (ignorant of what was going on in England), "then, my dearest, you will come and live with us, and we shall be almost as happy again as we ever were."

When Helen read those words, she needed no preacher to point the moral of her last half-year's experience. A little longer of patient endurance, a firmer trust, a more unreserved surrender to the guidance of conscience, and she would have been free and happy. Now was her bondage so much more heavy that even her thoughts must be fettered, and she must avoid any comparison of what *was* with what *might* have been as guilt.

In meek contrition she calmed herself to-day. She had wronged her husband by marrying him, little as he dreamed of any such wrong; and a



confession of that treachery to him would be useless and most cruel. The devotion of her life to his comfort and aid was the only retribution she could make, and this, by God's help, should be her daily sacrifice. She was not one who allowed any long interval between resolution and practice. Though the afternoon was sultry, and the shady parts of the garden looked inviting, she soon put on her bonnet and passed through it into the park, where she expected every minute to hear the wheels of the returning carriage.

She knew it would please her husband to see her come out to meet him, and the solemnity of his face, when alighting to hand her in, could not veil from her the pleasure she had thus conferred. He was so charmed to find her ready to attend to his detailed rehearsal of the day's business, that he proposed a prolongation of their drive in another direction; and, notwithstanding her earnest wish to enjoy it, she came home, looking intensely bored, quite worn out by having been expected to look



affectionate and interested during another long hour. She had been listening with gentle kindness, but she knew all the time that she was trying not to hear something her mind was incessantly repeating — the undeniable fact that she had married a pompous fool.

In the secret recesses of her heart there was a murmur, that if she had married any one except Arthur, in the way she married Sir Matthew, it had better have been poor Charles, that pleasant easy-going friend. A natural, but an erroneous conclusion. Association with a person like Sir Matthew harmed her nature far less than it would have been harmed had she accepted the other for her husband. (We are more easily lowered by a gradual incline, than by a direct and steep declivity.) To the moral standard of Charles Ashcroft she would have been tempted to conform, by the genial vivacity of his inferior nature, to the spiritual levels of her husband nothing could incline her to stoop. His horizon of duty, though



wider, was too much cramped by narrowness of mind, too much admired by his own conceit, to circumscribe *her* spirit's ambition. Beside him she felt that elevation of soul was her only escape from despair.

She strove by gentlest influence to raise his standard also; there were words in Scripture which seemed a guarantee for the hopefulness of such an attempt. But it was an arduous experiment. When she ventured upon some modest intimation of her own more spiritual views, his deaf mind failed to take her meaning.

She would speak to him of holy things with the hasty voice and hesitating air of one who feels that though her companion *cannot* see them in the same light, yet so they ought to be seen by every Christian; she would speak with a diffidence which to her hearer implied mistrust of the truth of her opinions, rather than of her own consistency; because she was so full of fear, lest her own keenly felt faults should neutralize the effect of her



words. And he would listen with a sort of patronizing indulgence, as to the prattle of a dear good child; and then turn the conversation as quickly as he could to something else. Sowing good seed thus, with trembling hands, she scarcely dared hope for any harvest, or expect a time when she should see it, and rejoice together with him.



## CHAPTER IX.

“Am I content with life?

Life without love, such as the heart once knew?

Ask not my heart: it cannot answer you;

Oft with itself at strife.

“Ask Reason—she can tell

Of conquest, and of slowly won content—

But though all passion in the heart is spent,

Some feelings still rebel.

“For sometimes, looking back,

I see the bliss that might have been prolonged,

I mourn the trust that was so deeply wronged

(Remembrance has its rack!)

“And sickening doubt begins

To flicker o’er the irrevocable past,

Too late! Ah me! it does not always last

The calm that reason wins.”—JUDITH.

NORMAN and Mercy came back, and early in August spent a few weeks at Drumchase: a refreshing time for Helen. Then first she tasted



all the delight of having a home to welcome them in.

Sorrow, and the inward shame which so often came with it, had made her very unsusceptive of the pleasures of rule in a stately mansion hitherto. She had done the honours of her position well and gracefully: even in Sir Matthew's eyes her conduct in society was perfect, and next to himself he thought her its greatest acquisition. But vanity was not her besetting sin, and luxurious circumstances were so natural to her that she quickly forgot their advantages. It was a return to her natural element, and so far it was soothing and quieting, but while luxury, elegance, and ease had appeased the coarser instincts of a refined nature, they had given scope for its more subtle, and radical, and unextinguishable tastes to insist on satisfaction. And to pine for intellectual sympathy while sitting in her perfect drawing-room, and hearing Sir Matthew's folly spout and simmer and bubble over in the heat of consti-



tutional self-complacency, was quite as bad as wishing for greater refinement under fire of Mr. Trouncer's jokes.

But with Mercy, joy entered, and it was so delightful to see her sisterly pride in all the outward blessings of her new home, that partly she forgot, and partly she did not dare to confess that anything more essential was missing. And Mercy was not one to find it out: her nature was too simple to understand any complicated grief. Besides, she brought with her a little two-year old boy, and a baby; and putting this last into Helen's arms, would tell her what exquisite bliss she would feel if she should ever have children of her own. The bare verbal mention of such an enchanting prospect brightened Helen's present by the glow borrowed from an imaginary future.

Again, Mercy was poor compared to her sister, and Sir Matthew, liberal with regard to money, liked her to carry out her heart's desire, and promptly promoted any of her bountiful plans.



"What could dear Nelly wish for more in a husband?" was Mercy's thought, standing as she did in the sunshine of their married life. "Such an excellent kind man! Rather stiff in manner, perhaps, but then his age! Really, Norman, I think we cannot be thankful enough that she has been so mercifully guided in her choice."

Neither of them could read her feelings when Norman, as apt to blunder as of yore, asked in public, when she had last heard of Arthur Lemayne? She *had* heard through his brother of the falsity of their mother's rumour about a matrimonial engagement, but she could not speak of that, and was very pale when she answered with a few superficial words, looking anxiously to see if her husband heard the question; for she had told him all about it.

She need not have felt any concern on his account: it never once occurred to him to imagine that the wife of the owner of Drumchase should



think again of a fortuneless adventurer on the other side of the globe.

To the visit of the Slades succeeded a wedding visit from the Tidemans, and then Beatrice and Mr. Chadleigh were able to come.

If Helen could have absorbed half the congratulations she received, she must have felt herself a happy woman.

But the congratulations of any one except her sister,—whom she wished to make happy at any cost of self-suppression, were most painful to her, reminding her afresh of the wretched deceit that duty now imposed. No one now must guess that she was unhappy; and yet for the good of others, she longed to protest against the fatal error she had committed,—to warn other women against a similar wreck.

How many others would be led to think as she thought, when she married, that by fulfilling a woman's natural destiny, she had the best chance of securing happiness, *because* she acted in agree-



ment with natural laws; forgetting that to those who have been brought under allegiance to a higher law, the satisfaction of the lower claim can never suffice. Unhappy woman! She had burdened herself with the lifeless body of a wife's duties, and vainly hoped to find the spirit come with them. She had, for a few feverish months, believed in the power of circumstances more than in the force of principles, and now circumstances tormented, and forsaken principles were seen in all their majesty by the dismal light of humiliating experience. But, by its very humiliations, it helped her to see the only means left for recovering peace. A closer clinging to the only One whom she might now complain to, a humbler endeavour to please that One by doing her duty to the uttermost.

Sir Matthew thought her a prodigy of excellence; his poor Mary had been gentle and good, but this lovely creature, with all her talents, was more docile; listened to him with more attention, carried out all his little stratagems for



making simple things toilsome, and short business tedious with the obedience of a little child. Indeed he would have been puzzled how to improve her, had he not cherished the delightful superstition that he was forming her mind by the course of study in which he engaged her, the regular readings in Alison, with one of James's novels if she *must* have fiction. She was only too glad to do anything he wished that involved no strain of insincerity; and had he known anything of human nature, her almost exaggerated sympathy with him, either in joke or in earnest, whenever this was possible, would have told him how painfully she was aware of the chasm of difference between their two natures. But neither her ostentatious sympathy, nor her languid weary smile, ever struck him as being deficient of any mark of pleasure. If she made a noise that resembled mirth or assent ever so little, it sufficed to give him encouragement for another harangue, and she was too gentle, both by nature and long habit



of endurance to wish to deprive him of the pleasure of hearing his own voice. Sometimes she would make an adventurous sally into his temperamental domain, and begin to talk eagerly of things that used to be her mental necessities, but she found no acceptance for them; her vivacity did not stimulate, and her powers could not be appreciated by him. And if he, in his fashion, began to talk gaily with her, his unpliant impoverished nature so pressed out all the spring and mirth of her's that she felt as if she could only reply in gravest earnest: for we are never really gay till we can be quite ourselves.

She was spared one trial with her husband, which is seldom escaped in close contact with a sterile intellect—badinage of an exasperatingly trivial kind. For this, Sir Matthew was too solemn. He felt his responsibilities as High Sheriff too heavily to be inclined to joke, and no one who had lived with him a week would have tried to explain a joke to him. Indeed, he had hardly



sense enough of the ridiculous to meet the exigencies of cultivated society, and when a humorous allusion was brought before him, he felt at a loss, and looked important to fill up the blank. Incapable of conversation in its strictest sense, he seized every opportunity that offered of expanding trite sentiments in verbose Johnsonian English. At home Helen had her hand on her workbox whenever he began, but she saw her guests more defenceless, and wished that for his own credit he could see their restive looks and decently covered yawns. Except from a voice we love, generalizations, as a habit, are irritating: they imply some extent of observation within or without, and yet often reveal the lack of either.

Now and then she had thought whether she would *tell* him of this little foible, or that especially displeasing trick of voice; he might bear such strictures from her very possibly, but what would it avail to hear them at his age? And, besides, was it honest to affect candid accusations like



these, when his whole style of being, mind and manner, and look, were alike repulsive to her taste. Occasionally in a spasm of chagrin, it seemed more natural to tell him that if in all and every respect he could be other than he was it would be an improvement; and such a saving of time in criticism as this, was the only form of it to which she then inclined.

Then followed reaction, and if her manner towards him became more tender, and she spoke with increased gentleness, it was from a strengthening conviction that she never could love him as he ought to be loved; that he was for ever denied the affection it was now his duty to believe in and hers to profess, and seeing his doom, she pitied and forgave his short-comings as only a woman can.

Many a common-place woman has thrown herself away by marrying as Helen had married, but for such there are common-place compensations: for her high-strung spirit there was this



unalterable decree that "the mighty" shall be "mightily tormented."

Fighting bravely with a thousand disgusts, often defeated and overthrown within, but quick to rise for new efforts and patient in seeking the only help that could now support her in them, she passed through the lagging winter months.

Looking back on the first anniversary of her first wedding-day, she saw how much had been won by diligent perseverance in duty; but she could hardly believe that she had only been married a year. To herself she seemed so wholly changed. What a void within! The love that had been her life in former years was legally dead; it was all over, and yet must not be brought back to mind as *quite* dead feelings may; as her constant love to Arthur *had* sometimes been remembered so long as she believed him inconstant. It must now be called folly, and forgotten; or sin, and vehemently resisted. All its hope and fear finished;—the extinct passion



so much a thing of the past that no trace of it remained in the present;—and yet, *was* it totally extinct?

In the dull calm of her present life it seemed impossible that her heart could ever thrill again: and almost did she hate herself for the insensibility she had so conscientiously attained. The sternness which she had been obliged to exercise against her own rebellious feelings, seemed to her to have invaded her thoughts as well as her manner, to make all rigid, fixed, anything but what they used to be. The incessant curb of self-control, that forbearance which Sir Matthew necessitated, would not admit of relaxation one hour in the day. His innocent weaknesses and vainglorious follies were so many that before she had done guarding against the bitterness occasioned within by one, she had to recall her principles afresh to meet new provocations.

Other alterations in her habitual manner were striking even to herself. She recalled how at



the Chadleighs she used to wonder at the shocking submissiveness of Mrs. Lorimer when speaking to Beatrice; at the numberless little arrogancies she discerned in her friend; and on the part of her household, servilities as small and as numerous. Now that she was mistress of Drumchase, she perceived how inevitably the same tendencies overtook her own generous nature. With such a household as hers, and the web of social interests that now depended on her, she *could* not give time to tedious stories, and all the slow circumlocutions of embarrassed underlings; and had involuntarily learned the art of cutting them short by quick turns, imposed silence, and repelling looks.

And, in past times, she never noticed whether insignificant people adapted their remarks to her taste or no. But if now they grazed it, she felt a shade of the same displeasure that used to surprise her in the face of a more prosperous friend.



Such was the result of her self-examination, while dressing on the morning of the tenth of April. A glorious day for sunshine and songs and universal growth. Helen wished it had not been so beautiful. No feeling within her harmonized with such an exulting world. A still grey morning would have been more exhilarating; "for ah!" she said to herself, "there is now no one to do for my nature what sunlight is doing for every bud and blade of grass; no one draws out the fragrance and brightest tints of my being!"

Norman and Mercy had left England for Canada a little before Christmas.



## CHAPTER X.

"Trivial the biographic scroll  
Save as a history of the soul,  
Often whose mightiest events  
Are dumb and secret incidents.  
A man's true life and history  
Is like the bottom of the sea,  
Where mountains and huge vallies hide,  
Below the wrinkles of the tide,  
Under the peaceful mirror, under  
The shaking tempest's foam and thunder."

WILLIAM ALLINGHAM.

HUGH was at home for the Easter holidays, and had long since altered his opinions about Helen. How she came to care for an old stick like Sir Matthew was still a puzzle to the ardent-minded boy; but "she was an angel, and no mistake," according to his verdict; too sincere to be sus-



pected of diplomacy; too gentle and unselfish to have married on any vulgar speculation for place and power.

On the morning of her wedding-day, he had been out early to try and find some blue hyacinths for her, and came in some few minutes after his brother and sister-in-law had sat down to breakfast. Sir Matthew was a martinet about punctuality, and interrupted him while wishing them many happy returns of the day, to ask if he might "inquire why he absented himself that morning from family prayers?"

"Well, I couldn't find one of these things open in the dingle, and I wanted you to have the first to-day, Helen, because you said you were so fond of them; so I got old Knollys to show me where he said some forward ones grew on the sunny side of Westwood. Hulloo! a letter from Theresa to me!" he cried, seeing a cover with a foreign postage-stamp. "What's the old girl got to tell me about?"



"Be so good as to remember that you are not in the stables, Hugh. Is there any inclosure for me in my sister's cover?"

"Yes; that is," said Hugh, turning very red, "if I think you and Helen won't mind. She makes such a mystery about it, I can't half understand her letters; but I believe the long and the short of it is, that she is coming to England in May, and wants to find out through me if Helen will make any difference."

"Any difference!" she exclaimed, smiling; "how should I?"

"Why, you see, she thinks you mayn't like her living here as usual."

This blunt exposition of the secret missive touched Sir Matthew on one of the tenderest points of his character. He was a good brother, and had long ago determined that Theresa should never lose her old home at Drumchase, but he was not strong enough for perfect candour; and, remembering certain painful passages between his



sister and his poor Mary, and, thinking it most probable that the wandering life Theresa had begun would continue for an indefinite period, he had never broken to Helen the fact that now he was obliged to take for granted. He had never plainly said, "As soon as my sister returns from Italy, you must consider her a member of our household;" hence some shade of annoyance as he read Theresa's note, in which she named the middle of May for the time of her coming; "if" (with four underlining dashes) "I may believe myself welcome." Hence, according to his nature, something more of a strut in his tone as he passed the note on to his wife, who had been listening and watching with mute distress, and said,—

"Of course, my love, we are of one mind about such things. I would not pay you such an ill-compliment as to doubt it. Let's see; who do we expect for our May visitors? Did you not tell me you had invited the Heathcotes? Theresa



will be pleased to make their acquaintance; and there's the ball on the eighteenth; she won't care for that, but she may like some of the people we shall have here for it."

He ran on thus as long as he could without a pause, and Helen, who had held Theresa's note before her long enough to read it several times over, whilst trying to recover calmness, gave it back to him at last, and said, with some emphasis,

"You never told me, Matthew, that I was to expect your sister to reside here."

"No, my love, it was not worth while: her plans were so uncertain. You will like Theresa; she has her crotchets—most women have when they are past forty."

"Theresa has an uncommon lot though!" Hugh ejaculated.

"You will oblige me, Hugh, if you will allow me to conclude a sentence:—but she is not in very good health, and is obliged to take a good deal of care ——"



"Superintends her own digestion all day long, but is a good old girl, nevertheless," muttered Hugh; for an untimely sneeze suspended the voice of his brother.

"So much so that the aspect of her sleeping apartment is a matter of real importance; and I must beg you to have the four end rooms of the south gallery set apart for her use. She always prefers them."

"Four rooms!"

"Her maid, Mrs. Priestly, requires two."

"I shall hope to do whatever you wish in regard to your sister," was all that Helen could prevail on herself to say; and then she left the room, feeling that the new burden laid upon her could not be rightly accepted till she had quelled a mutiny going on within. What an addition to the daily ugliness of her life! A middle-aged crotchety invalid sister-in-law, as pompous, no doubt, as her brother, and, probably, more narrow-minded; and touchy, with that worst form of



touchiness, the dignified hesitation line; or she would not have scored that ominous IF so vigorously. A woman who would believe herself devoted to the consideration of other people's feelings while exacting the most punctilious subservience to her own!

The prospect was sickening. This was a form of "worse" which it needed a very distinct recognition of marriage vows to submit to with tolerable grace. And Helen knew well that submission in word and deed would not here suffice for the fulfilment of duty: that to give a verbal welcome, and feel a grudge against her who accepted it, would be cruel. She must school herself into kindly feeling for a most undesired housemate.

Oh! how could the linnets go on piping their soft little songs on the tree opposite her window, as if life was an easy process, while she was wrestling with her own angry spirit; at one minute ruled by conscience, and the next a



rebel, declaring that she *could* not bear this new infliction, that this one load more was intolerable.

Conscience told her that she ought to write at once to Miss Blinkhorn, and assure her that she and her husband would be ready to receive her at the time she named; but nature revolted from using even the barest expressions of civility. Conscience said, "Sooner or later you must do this;" but nature shrieked, "I cannot," and so she went on, doing industriously a number of little things which it was well, not necessary, to do, trying thus to stifle her compunction at leaving undone what she felt to be at once so right and so difficult.

Callers, taking advantage of the fine day, occupied the greater part of the afternoon. As she walked up and down the terrace, with an admiring guest, who wished to see the view from it, and heard her reiterate: "What a lovely peaceful-looking place it is! How delightful it must be



to live in such a sylvan paradise!" it was exquisite labour to be affable and coherent in reply,—to smile at appropriate times and support the semblance of ease; for her thoughts were in such dire conflict, that they hardly suffered her to heed her own words, and these seemed to be forced out of a machine, which might at any moment give way, and reveal its broken spring and merely mechanical action.

She looked at the placid faces of other people with a kind of astonishment that her own state of feeling had not been detected by them, and when they were gone, and she was again at liberty, shrunk from indoors solitude and hastened to order the carriage round before her husband could intercept her, and say it was too late for a drive.

In the balmy air of an April evening, between five and six, she tried, as she drove along, to set her feelings to rights, to come to a fresh understanding with her own heart about its



misery, to call it a misapprehension. Here was every one else looking happy enough to enjoy sunshine, why should she not also? Could she not be, at least, as happy as that empty-faced nursemaid who was stringing cowslips as she idled along the road, for the baby held by the nurse? Could she not try to be as reckless as the butcher's boy, whistling as he went? Vain question—she was not at peace with herself, for she was in a false position. If but for a few minutes she kept her thoughts more pleasantly occupied, they fell back, ever and anon, to the depths of her secret horror—to the nightmare sensation that she had bound herself for life to duties most repugnant to her nature, because that to perform them at all, she must never forget to dissemble.

She saw beyond her present, trouble upon trouble, like the many piled clouds of a very stormy day, and it did not occur to her that, as they one by one heaved up to a certain range,



and meeting the light of the sun, were by it gilded to glory and beauty, so these dreaded trials coming under the influence of a Saviour's love could attain a beauty not their own, which might enable her to encounter each with courage, and even thankfulness.

Before dinner, finding herself alone with Hugh in the drawing-room, she said,—

“Is your sister like my husband, Hugh?”

“No, a precious deal sharper: better looking, too.”

“Good-looking, and so very rich, I wonder she is still unmarried!”

As the vulgar-notioned formula passed her lips, she wondered what could have induced her to say such a stupid thing.

“Oh, poor old thing! it's no wonder, that; she has refused dozens of people, I believe; but years ago, before I was born or thought of, she had some unhappy affair; I used to hear my old nurse say she jilted the gentleman——”



His brother came in and the subject dropped.

After dinner, at the hour when young elm leaves look small and black against the amber glory of a long past sunset, Helen took a pen and wrote these lines to her sister-in-law; the light of duty being as clearly and narrowly cast upon her mind, as the light of the wax-candle upon her table, before she permitted the curtains to be let down, and the lamps to be lighted.

“MY DEAR MISS BLINKHORN,—

WE hope you will be able to reach Drum-chase before May has lost its first beauties in the park and gardens. I shall do my best to prevent your finding any unpleasant change in your old home; and shall hope that you will make allowance for”—that last sentence she erased, and only added, “you shall find your suite of rooms thoroughly aired and quite ready. I daresay your brother will like to add a few lines to this,



so I will say good-by, wishing you a prosperous journey home.

“Yours very sincerely,

“H. BLINKHORN.”

When Sir Matthew came in, she put this note into his hands, saying,—

“Is this what you like said? I hope it is. I wanted to give you some pleasure on our wedding-day.”

Every word had cost her an effort, but now the joy of self-conquest began, and, seeing the heartfelt satisfaction of her husband, pleased and rewarded her to a degree she could not have credited during the day. She kissed his high tight forehead of her own accord, and was able to laugh with Hugh that evening more gaily than usual.

And so far the battle was won; but it was a contest often renewed; and during the weeks that followed, she shrunk from speaking of the expected arrival with an almost insuperable dislike. She knew the day was drawing near, but it



seemed giving a kind of sanction to the plan she abhorred to speak of it; to bring forward the misery sooner than need be. And when her husband began to rise on tiptoe, and arch his scanty eyebrows while dilating upon the pleasure he should feel in introducing her to his estimable sister, she had much difficulty in resisting the temptation to cut him short, and did very often abruptly turn the subject.



## CHAPTER XI.

"Elle parait une bonne fille; peu d'esprit, peu de piété; fort occupée de sa personne; visionnaire sur la santé; ménagère, assez douce et sage; persuadée qu'elle a un nom, un sang à soutenir: froide; sèche; d'un abord pénible; point aimée en général."—MDE. DE MAINTENON.

"To the scenes, and the men,  
And the life, and the ways, she had left; still oppressed  
With the same hungry heart, and unpeaceable breast  
The same, to the same things."—OWEN MEREDITH.

In the cold green gloom of a rainy May evening, about half-an-hour before dinner-time, Theresa Blinkhorn's carriage drove up to the hall door. Her brother wished Helen to go into the hall to welcome her, as soon as the carriage came in sight; and not content with telling both of the footmen separately to let him know as soon as they saw it, he passed and repassed to and fro



from the library to the vestibule, to the great disturbance of their tempers, just to make sure that they were on the watch. An alarming sign to Helen. If so much fuss was to be made about Miss Blinkhorn before she came, what would not her presence occasion! But this deduction was incorrect: Theresa's nature was more powerful than her brother's, and an obscure awe of it mingled with his affection. A relation who has anything formidable in the character, becomes a sort of Esau after long absence. And Sir Matthew had chosen a second wife since his sister had gone away three years before, wearied out with the pomps of his affection for the first: he could seldom take a joke, but he had some acquaintance with Theresa's scornful gibes.

"My love, I fancy Theresa may prefer having a fire this damp evening; do you object to having it lighted in the drawing-room and dining-room?"

"Oh, no; not at all, if you wish it."



"Do you not think the order had better be given at once?"

"Yes, if you please."

Her "yes" had a "no" at its roots; and as she rose to ring the bell, she looked at the thermometer on the mantelpiece: it stood at sixty-eight. Already she felt suffocated. Just then one of the servants announced, "Miss Blinkhorn's carriage in sight."

And Sir Matthew hurried his wife into the hall. Standing with his arm on her white shoulder (for she had dressed for dinner at his request before the usual time), and with soft long curls near his almost hairless head, Theresa first caught sight of him. Ah! how little did Helen guess the feelings with which *she* was seen; and the sadness which accompanied this return.

Her first sight of Theresa showed a tall and stately person, with a face that looked tired of its pride, and disappointed and chagrined by life. She looked much more than forty-five; but then



her slow movement gave the idea of age. In her arms she carried a little terrier dog, with a cankered expression of face; and a grave slate-coloured maid, who got out after her, held in her arms a shivering Italian greyhound, tied up in its housings with blue ribbon. A page, whose looks betrayed as much impudence as servility can hide, followed them into the hall with a couple of basket-work kennels.

“How d’ye do, Matthew? how long it is since we have seen each other,” said Miss Blinkhorn, still holding the dog under the one arm. “Oh! yes; no need to introduce me—your wife—how d’ye do? you know my dislike to a scene of old; pray don’t think you need bore yourself to welcome me with long speeches, Matthew; I know your kindness.”

But her disclaimer failed to check them altogether; and Helen, much at a loss for words herself, was patting the greyhound in Mrs. Priestly’s arms while they went on.



Regardless of interrupting, Theresa turned to her and said,—

“*Have* you any veal in the house? Patch can take mutton; poor fellow, he’s always hungry: but Whimsy is a little upset by the journey, and veal is the only thing I should care for her to have.”

“I was not aware that special dinner orders had to be given for your dogs,” replied Helen, trying to laugh. “Jenkyns, will you inquire? Very likely there are some veal cutlets left—we had some at luncheon.”

“Oh, excuse me, but dressed meat will not do: it must be uncooked.”

“Ask Mrs. Bruce what she has, Jenkyns,” said Helen, and turned away from the dogs, proposing that her sister-in-law should prepare for dinner.

“I thank you; but I have no thought of coming down again to-day. How absurd of Matthew to expect it! Mrs. Priestly knows



what I must have. Pray do not trouble yourself further about me. I am an old *habituée*, remember; the servants know my ways." (They did indeed.) And so saying she began to move upstairs, dogs and servants following.

Helen returned to the drawing-room alone, feeling quite aghast at the prospect before her; too much so to think of her sister-in-law's sensations. These were sad enough. In the forlorn independence of an old maid she had left her home; in the same dreary, self-absorption she had returned to it;—come back to a place where she well knew she was not wanted, if not positively unwelcome,—come back to please herself, to enjoy her rights, but not the sweet privilege of woman—the power of making others happy.

There was a tenderness in her voice that evening when she invited her snarling Patch to get up on the sofa beside her, which was pathetic in absurdity. Those dogs were as the waste-pipes of



her heart. And when she sent word to her brother, that she hardly felt equal to seeing him in her sitting-room that evening, it was not that she had no yearning for the old brotherly presence, but that she felt too depressed to talk to him as she ought about his lovely young wife. After a tiring journey, and all the conflicts with melancholy and regret that a coming back involves, she was in that infirm state of self-love which makes one's spirits to fall beside any prosperous companion.

With the next morning's light, braver feelings roused; she blamed the sadness of her reflections on the previous evening; and in the upper regions of her mind she now kept up the game of thinking herself *of course* welcome;—the right person come to the right place; and resolved not to *allow* her due honours to be scantied by a joyous beauty, though she were a brother's wife. Theresa was no longer handsome. But do what she would with this inward *credo*, there were other thoughts



struggling to be answered; and a longing for some ideal beauty in her own circumstances, some soothing pleasure to veil the arid blanks of her own separate existence. There was none; apart from self-deception, the cold truth was, that she was in a home where only duty gave her permanent welcome, that here as well as abroad, she was an unnecessary adjunct to those with whom she associated.

In friendship she had not been happy, though she had begun many a promising experiment in it. The self-occupation to which she had been used from infancy blinded a mind not otherwise dull, and made it unsympathetic; and by arrogance and selfishness of which she was quite unconscious, she had alienated many who once loved her. What was still more fatal to friendship, she had too much pride to be truthful. Before there is attachment there *must* be sincerity, and Theresa had the misfortune of loving her own ideas of dignity more than absolute truth.



With these great flaws, there was yet much in her character that was noble and good; and perhaps it was the unrecognized sense of a fine disposition ruined, that made her so willing to consider her bodily health as the cause of every defect. To the care of this body she gave her whole mind. Dress had once been an object of fastidious interest, but that taste gradually subsided as her personal appearance became less attractive. "I have not health for the exertions of society now," was her account of the change.

And now she liked best the company of clergymen and doctors, for they alone were likely to pay her any close attention, to study her peculiarities, and prescribe for them. She had been used to so much attention in earlier days! Accordingly, she was seldom without a confidential adviser for her soul, and a judicious medical friend. There was in truth, so little the matter with her health, that it taxed a doctor's ingenuity to go on prescribing for her, as if he was likely



to do it any good. The last she consulted had made a clever hit when he ordered that her maid should bring her a poached egg at half-past six every morning, with the express proviso that it must be one laid that very day. The difficulty of securing a punctual hen, alone recommended the measure to the poor pampered woman, and he knew that the peculiarity of this prescription would give it a charm for her, besides making her believe her regimen of far more importance than it really was.



## CHAPTER XII.

“Nowe parde fole, yet were it bet for thee  
Have holde thy pece than shewde thy nicete ;  
It lyeth not in his wit nor in his will,  
But sothe is said, a fole can nat be still.”

CHAUCER'S *Assembly of Foules*.

“He hasteth to teach and to preach as the war-horse rusheth to  
the battle,  
He wearieth by stale proofs where none looked for a reason.”

TUPPER.

WITH what aching solicitude do those watch for any neglect of consideration, who are in circumstances which make much of their comfort and self-contentment to depend on observances of respect! The only perceptible pledge of her presence *not* being irksome that Theresa could seek, she found in the unvarying gentleness of her sister-in-law ; who knew by bitter experience the



heart of an unneeded member of a family-party, and knowing, spared it every avoidable pain. She watched suspiciously for slights; she only detected kindness, and little by little Helen's conscientious courtesies began to win her heart. She could not dispute Matthew's taste, or refrain from admiring his wife. She pitied her too, and wanted to discover if Helen knew that she was pitiable: but Helen was too good a wife to allow any opportunity for these condoling researches. There would soon have been full confidence between them, but that she was thoroughly afraid of Theresa; and this often made her colder in manner than it was at all her wish to be. Often would she check herself in some kind little act or endearing word from the suspicion that it was prompted by a wish to propitiate Theresa's favour—a fancy abhorrent to pride: and then again the dominant desire of her heart to do her duty thoroughly, urged to more zealous efforts to please her, and almost persuaded the proud woman that she had



found in her brother's wife some one who *could* appreciate her peculiar nature. She cherished the notion of having great peculiarities, both as a distinction, and as a mode of explaining facts that to careless observers might seem the result of being a rather unamiable sort of person.

Her brother Matthew she snubbed without remorse, and sometimes the endeavour to keep them in good-humour with each other was inexpressibly wearying to Helen. No one knows, till they have tried it, the unhappiness of a woman whose duty it is to look up, where naturally she could only look down. And now, she had to do her utmost to prevent his collisions with Theresa's temper as well. Nothing in life is much more provoking than a fool in authority: unhappily Sir Matthew's strongest taste was for government. He exercised it in all kinds of petty ways as irritating as they were needless.

Now his wife had attached herself so firmly to him and to her duty as a wife, that she could pass



such things over with a smile, but Theresa was chafed by them beyond endurance. In act she was perfectly free, but he laboured to subjugate opinion, where he could not control conduct. And the arrogance of tone with which he expressed his own mental destitution, his ridiculous habit of pronouncing every wider view than his own unorthodox, worried her to exasperation. It seemed that the process of arbitrating for the souls of other people hid from him the pettiness of his own mind: he spoke so habitually as if his approval and veto were the main things the world waited for, that he overlooked the fact that he was one of the most insignificant creatures in it.

There were days during this summer when his wife would certainly have agreed to Fénelon's estimate of matrimony. "*Le mariage est un état de tribulation, très pénible, auquel il faut se préparer en esprit de pénitence quand on s'y croit appelé.*"

She had been herself on the battle-field of other



people's domestic wars, and left them with the cursory regrets, and soon passing pity of those who wonder how any poor wretch could endure such a life, as they plunge again into the busy dream of their own. Why, then, should it seem strange to her, that not one of her houseful of visitors should now divine the wild depths of trouble that sometimes surged beneath the calm exterior of her often envied lot? Perhaps some rare mood of sympathy would elicit the comment, "I wonder how Lady Blinkhorn gets on with her sister-in-law?" or "Is it possible that this bewitching creature can be happy with such an old oddity as Sir Matthew?" and so on. But faint curiosity was all that the facts of her life drew forth: and how could she expect them to be understood by acquaintance, when Mercy persisted in felicitations every time she wrote. She had been so happy as a wife herself that the unhappiness of any wife was the last thing she was likely to guess.



One evening, one of the few during the summer months, when they were alone, Sir Matthew had been standing beside his wife and sister as they sat at work, haranguing upon some threadbare theme till both were silenced by fatigue. Helen had heard Theresa's bottomless yawns going on at every break, when both had hoped for a pause, and feeling as if she must make a diversion, she said to her husband. "My dear, I promised to take a book and a few flowers to poor Mrs. Jones at the South Lodge; will it be troubling you too much to gather a few roses and pinks for her? I am quite too tired myself."

Always pleased to gratify her, Sir Matthew trotted off, and before he had well shut the door Theresa cried out :

"Oh! what a long-suffering organ the ear is! why did nature provide no instant means of closing it, like the eye, against the annoyance it is so constantly subject to."

"Perhaps because few would care to be deaf



half an hour, and you, Theresa, would often need ear protection as long."

"There is not in the creation a more burdensome thing than a persistent flow of words!"

"I think I have learned to enjoy being silent more than talking myself."

"But, my dear Helen, do be merciful to me: your nerves seem made for miraculous endurance, but if you *could* say anything to hinder Matthew from the 'little stranger' part of his conversation now,—you know the fact of a baby being born at the Lodge is far from uncommon and not interesting to most people either,—that they named it Barnabas because it was born on St. Barnabas's day, does not make it more so. It is *so* wearing to hear him going on to everybody who comes here, on the same stupid subject. As I always used to tell him, "If you would *but* say something worth listening to, I might be able to attend, but this baby talk does so exhaust my nervous system—"

"Perhaps I had better tell him in a general



way that your head does not well stand much talking of any sort. He is so good-natured about any real suffering."

"Oh, pray don't hinder him from talking, I can generally leave the room before I am quite overpowered, and you know the fate of the ass who was stopped by a blow every time he began to bray. \* It might be fatal to poor Matthew."

Such remarks as these from his sister did more towards raising her husband in Helen's heart than any cryings-up of his merits ever could. They roused all her generosity, and it was, to tell the truth, refreshing to look at his foibles in a merely comical light. She turned the conversation into

\* A story which conveys so deep a truth, that it shall be given entire. "An English gentleman residing in the East, kept one of the asses of the country for his use, who was so troublesome with his noise, that he ordered a slave to strike him on the nose with a cane when he began to vociferate: in consequence of which, the creature in a few days fell from his appetite, and would actually have pined away and died for want of the liberty of making his own frightful noise."—*Bishop Horne's Note Book*. Putting a donkey's "nose out of joint" in any sense, dangerously lowers his vitality.



another channel; but, when alone in her room an hour or two afterwards, Theresa's words came back to her, and she laughed out loud as she had hardly ever done since her marriage.

Her struggles against repining and disdain had been terribly in earnest; to meet the same difficulties with good-humoured ridicule seemed to lighten her burden immediately. And she could not but see with secret amusement that though Theresa laughed at pompousness and self-importance in her brother, the same tendencies marked her own conduct. Helen had often noticed with surprise the solemn complacency with which she took her daily constitutional airings in the close carriage. *Her* pomps attached to the care of her health and her dogs.



## CHAPTER XIII.

“Is it possible ?

Is it possible ?

That any may find

Within one heart so diverse mind,

To change or turn as weather or wind ?

Is it possible ?

Is it possible ?

To spy it in an eye,

That turns as oft as chance or die,

The truth whereof can any try ?

Is it possible ?

It is possible.—SIR T. WYATT.

It was a year later, on a bright April day, that Helen was writing the following lines, while waiting for her husband to go out with her. The day before, she had chanced to open her book of prayers at a page where the heartsease, gathered five summers ago, when she sent one



to Arthur, had been placed. For many months past she had not looked at it. She had been much happier, and the contrast of this year's feelings with those preceding it had struck her with thankful surprise, and caused a versifying humour to which grief is seldom prone.

Tw'as gathered with a trembling hand,  
Press'd to a burning cheek,  
When scarcely could the heart withstand  
The thoughts that made it weak ?

'Tw'as worn upon a throbbing breast  
That cried to heaven for aid ;  
Where hot tears fell, and hands were press'd  
Imploring peace, 'twas laid.

Upon a page of earnest prayer  
I found the blossom left ;  
No longer sweet, no longer fair,  
Of all but form bereft.

The purple from its petals gone,  
The soft gloss from its eye—  
Am I as faded ? I as wan ?  
My spring past utterly ?

I had no spring ; a fever flush  
Coloured my pale life then ;  
A sweet delirious joy—oh, hush !  
It may not come again.



Dumb witness of heart-shaken hours,  
When feeling spent its force in tears,  
Stay with me while thy sister-flowers  
Die in the frosts of wiser years.

To holy, humble words still cleave,  
As does my spirit to their sense,—  
Though thou mayst whiten, and I grieve,  
We both have found a sure defence.

I took thee from the summer heat ;  
Me from my passion God withdrew—  
His grace alone relieved me : mercy sweet  
Shut up my soul in prayer, and made thee true.

This unlaboured expression of her mood that day, was a fair sample of Helen's present state of mind. She was feeling more at peace than she had been for many years. The great desolating sorrow of her life remained unforgotten for a day—but accepted ; the belief that Arthur loved another, had been replaced by a *generally* sincere wish that he might yet be made happy by a second attachment ; to the wearying foibles of her husband she had become so used that they now seldom fretted her temper. She was no longer dismayed by the bleak isolation of her inner life ; she recognized it as a daily penance



for a great and irretrievable fault, and the humility with which she bore it allayed irritation and restiveness under the yoke.

It is impossible, too, to be loved devotedly by any one whom we try to love, without a growing affection. It was now no figure of speech to say that she loved Sir Matthew tenderly—as women love the weak and the virtually dependent companion. And as to his sister, she had acquired a positive liking for her. The efforts it had cost her to be merely kind had won so many victories, that she felt towards her that peculiar sort of love which arises from self-complacency at getting on with a captious and difficult character. No one, probably, ever tried for twelve months heartily to help and comfort another person, however disagreeable, without experiencing some degree of this unlooked-for reward. Theresa loved Helen with unbounded admiration and trust; and the delicacy of Helen's nature prevented Theresa from knowing how much



compassion and self-sacrifice was mixed with her tenderness.

Her home was now dear to Helen; a fact that a year ago she would have denied as quite impossible in any future. To her astonishment, she really enjoyed life now—particularly she enjoyed the hours spent on the sea-coast, though her husband seldom gave her a chance of being alone beside the waves, which was her greatest delight.

To-day they were going to drive down to see the tide come in under the strong wind that was blowing from the west. Helen wanted Theresa to come with her, but she fancied the wind would be too rough on the shore, and took her airing in another direction. There were seldom many people about in the small fishing village to which they drove, but to-day the high sea had attracted several parties of visitors from the neighbourhood; and as Helen paced along on the sands beside her husband, while he dis-



coursed on the advantage that would accrue to the nation from a letter he had just despatched to *The Times*, she was aware of three people a few yards off, coming towards them, neither of whom she knew.

Neither? But that tall figure—that head bent down—that indolent gait—was it? could it be? She could not see the face, it was turned towards the sands apparently in quest of shells, which a young girl at his side picked up every now and then, and when full-handed, slipped round to put them into the pocket of his other companion—a short, grey-headed man, remarkably erect and composed in his bearing. He spoke, and the latter gentleman looked up. It was Arthur—thickly bearded, but unmistakably Arthur Lemayne.

Helen's whole being fired up in one second of extreme surprise, of trembling joy. But if she flushed with excitement at the first glance, she was cold with fear at the next; and as the



party drew near, so much she dreaded an encounter without the possibility of an explanation, that she almost hoped the drooping feather of her hat might shield her face from his recognition. To her astonishment, the stranger took off his hat when Sir Matthew bowed in passing, and Arthur gazed full in her face, one terrible questioning look in his eye, and did not pause, or bow, or smile. He looked much older, worn, and thin; evidently he did not choose to speak or even to recognize her.

A minute or two after they passed, Helen ventured to look back, but he had not cared to do so; only the young girl; she was standing still for a long stare at the retreating couple, and her large blue eyes fell with soft wonder upon Helen, and then she turned away hastily.

"He has told her who I am," thought Helen. And enough had passed between the two gentlemen to give the girl some idea that this chance meeting formed a crisis.



Sir Matthew's harangue had not been interrupted, and silence was, happily, all he expected from his wife just then. *His wife!* and Arthur three or four paces off, full of angry disdain! and all the time "the deep uttered her voice, and lifted up her hands on high."

Helen saw the plunging wave dash up as it touched a rocky part of the shore, and scatter in the rosy evening light its thousand plumes of sparkling foam. She heard its magnificent chorus of triumph, but sight and hearing could not overpower more thrilling impressions; and she looked about her with the vacant observation of one half stunned, who sees what passes around, and feels what goes on within, with equal obscurity of perception. The majestic disregard of ocean for all that moves on earth, touched her sharply after a while; those thundering sunbright billows would have swept down the corpses of Arthur and Matthew and herself to their stormy home with the same tremendous mirth that seemed



to increase every minute with the rising tide. She could now hardly hear her husband's voice, though he had asked her twice, and loudly, if she would take another turn on the sands.

She was musing whether the indifference of Nature gave any intimation of regardlessness in Nature's God—whether it was possible that at such a time as this, when her past life threw up all its wrecks at the feet of a tedious and unhoping present, it *could* be thought, "*He taketh no knowledge*"—whether her heart and Arthur's were as insignificant to the Creator of the universe as the delicate shells which lay broken and divided beneath her weary tread. She did not consciously seek for scriptural re-assurance; it only seemed one of the freaks of memory which brought to mind the words, "Not one of them is forgotten before God." But the remembrance gave her strength, and, as if suddenly recalled to duty, she said,—

"I beg your pardon, Matthew, I really did not



hear you ask before ; if you do not mind going home already, I should be glad to do so : I feel tired."

And when they were in the carriage again, she told him whom they had just seen. "The cousin who once loved me," was her heart-wringing confession, but she spoke in so low a voice that he failed to take in this sentence, and, with an insincerity which was unusual to her, she saved herself from the stabs of his well-meaning advice by not repeating the explanation.

"Curious coincidence to-day, Theresa," he began, at dinner ; "I met an old neighbour, and Helen a relation, who did not recognize her it seems, but Beck has a longer memory."

"Mr. Beck ! Oh, Matthew, how long has he been near us again ?" and "Was that a Mr. *Anthony* Beck ?" were the almost simultaneous questions of the two ladies.

"Yes, my love, Anthony Beck ; did you ever meet him ?"



"Oh, no; but I have heard of him often from—— I beg your pardon, dear Theresa, you asked——"

"Well," continued Sir Matthew, "I did not like to stop and speak with strangers: it would have been awkward to both. I must find out if he is come back to stay. I've heard nothing of him for years. Those people who took his house have vacated it some two or three months, I was told."

"Was he looking well?"

Helen was in deep reverie, but Theresa's tone roused her attention, and she listened now with more interest.

"White-headed, snowy white, but his walk betokened vigour, and there was no look of decrepitude about him."

"Poor Anthony!" said Miss Blinkhorn, softly.

"Do you think, Matthew, that he will call on us?"

"From what I have known of him, I should



say decidedly no. I should anticipate no further advance. But I may ultimately think well to *invite* him here. There are proud natures of which one may safely predicate that *they* will never make the first move."

As he went on in this strain his sister began to look impatient, and Helen kindly gave the signal for moving. But Theresa did not stay in the drawing-room when they were alone together; she hastily left the room; and sent word, soon afterwards, that she should not return to tea.

"Poor Theresa! she has never quite forgotten that old affair with Beck," said Sir Matthew to his wife, stroking his knee contemplatively.

From what Helen could extract of his remembrances, it appeared that they had both been tenderly attached when Theresa was about twenty years old; but that her mother, a proud and overbearing woman, persuaded her to break off the engagement when she discovered that Mr. Beck



could never be rich, and had no aristocratic relations either. He had left his home ever since; and no one had taken his place in the heart of the ill-advised heiress.

## CHAPTER XIV.



## CHAPTER XIV.

“Nun war plötzlich alles vorbei, es war als ob der Engel ihm verlassen hätte; die Liebesflamme die so ganz seine Seele ausfüllte war in einem moment bis auf den letzten Funken erloschen. Er fühlte keinen Schmerz, kein Leid, aber Leere: es war ihm als wäre der Geist seiner Seele entwichen. Eine erschlaffende Gleichgültigkeit durchzückte ihn, todbringend wie das Gift, das ins Blut des Menschen übergeht.”—HANS ANDERSEN'S, O. T.

NEVER had Arthur Lemayne needed the patient mercy of a true friend so much as he did at this time. A year ago he had chanced to see in a newspaper some months old, the marriage of Charles Ashcroft; and from the moment he knew that his bride was not Helen (a possibility which Mrs. Lemayne had chosen never to take any notice of when answering his letters), he resolved to come back to the old country. He



had been a successful digger, a prosperous agriculturist, and was now a rich man; why should he care to increase wealth till he knew whether Helen would share it? He did not put this question to himself distinctly; there were compunctious remembrances of the course he had run since they parted, which prevented him—even in imagination—from coupling the ideas of what he now was, with what she had once loved so fondly and reverentially. He would have thought it almost profanation to suppose that her high-minded delicate nature could any longer love the moral ruin which now he felt himself to be. For with all his declensions in practice, he had never lost sight of his old standards of right and wrong; and with all his faults he had retained that integrity of mind which refuses to gloss over the hideousness of vice; and little as he thought it when in prayerless days he called himself "too great a sinner to pretend to pray," there was in his heart a self-loathing, a contrition, a deep



humility, and yearning for better things that brought him, it may be, nearer to Him who came to save sinners, than all the formal prayers and praises of one less desirous of pardon, and less sincere in repentance.

So the chaplain of the ship in which he returned used to tell him, as in the moonlight hours of tropical nights they smoked on the deck together. A good man accustomed to win from rough men the strong but few-worded confessions of an unquiet conscience-stricken soul. Arthur found great help in his counsels, for they were given with such manly boldness and such persuasive force of truth, that he could not evade conviction by calling them either hypocritical or merely spoken to suit his office.

He came back to England laden with evil experience and a stained memory, but resolved on reform, thinking himself wholly unworthy of Helen's love, but not without hope of her pity. When he met Richard at the railway station



nearest his home, he inquired first after his mother and then his cousin.

"Lady Blinkhorn you mean? Oh, I believe she is quite well; and a very grand lady now."

"Helen?"

"Yes, has not mother told you? She married about a year and a half ago, an old man, twice her age, but enormously rich;—take care what you are about with the ponies, Arthur, we shall be over into the ditch in a second; *pray* drive more steadily: they won't stand all this flogging indeed; my *good* fellow, do command yourself!"

"Confound it! they must learn to stand it," replied his brother continuing to lash them on, and grinding his teeth behind the forest of black hair around his mouth so as to keep it closed on worse expressions. But soon a steep hill obliged them to slacken their pace, and Arthur, throwing away the whip, with a loud and savage laugh, declared that Richard's ponies had as little pluck as their master, and jumped out of the



chaise, begging him to change places with him. Richard certainly had not courage again to approach the subject of the Blinkhorns, and was glad to make a diversion by asking what sort of horses he had had on his Australian farm.

Mrs. Richard Lemayne found her brother-in-law a formidable guest to entertain, and never enjoyed being alone in the room with one whose looks and words were an enigma to her own prim little mind. She always found some excuse for wishing to speak to Richard, or going to see if he was come in when he had only lately gone out.

After a week at his brother's, and a week's stay at Bristol where he could see his mother daily, and arrange with her for removal to a home of her own which he now wished to provide, he invited himself to stay with his old friend Anthony Beck, little thinking that Helen's new home was only six miles distant from his: (for he had not become acquainted with Mr. Beck



till his intimacy with the Blinkhorns had ended in silence and alienation; ) but Anthony, who had only lately returned from Germany to his long forsaken home knew it well, and gave him warning of the fact.

"You must have me, nevertheless, old fellow," was Arthur's reply, "unless you wish me to go head over heels to the bad. You are now my only chance. As to that woman, I care not a rush where she lives. She is nothing to me; and if we meet, I should cut one who has totally forfeited my esteem." For now Helen was degraded from her former unapproachable position in his heart; he thought of her with contempt, as one who had sold herself for the mean price of outward magnificence, and so thinking, began to deem himself by far the most virtuous, and assuredly the most constant of the two. *He* had never spoken of love to another woman; never shaken false hands with the showy world; never perjured himself, as every woman must who



marries an unloved husband. He still loathed himself, but he loathed yet more his ideas of his fallen idol, and if he could, he would have spurned her with obloquy. Well for her peace that she did not know the thoughts that were entertained about her a few miles off, some six weeks before she met him.

For two days after, Sir Matthew was in a ferment of irresolution as to the propriety of showing any attention to his old associate, Mr. Beck. Should he call and renew the intimacy once so painfully interrupted, or would it be more consistent with his dignity, to allow the long-standing coolness between them to last? His intellect, almost suffocated with decorum, knew not how to apply itself to such a question; neither did he quite know what was etiquette in this matter, and so he was entirely at fault.

Theresa's opinion he would not ask, for it could not be an agreeable subject to her; he little dreamed how anxiously she waited to know what



he meant to do about calling; he was thinking of dignity; she was feeling the last spasms of hope.

Helen, of course, he consulted, and many times a day, but her opinion was given but faintly, and with unwonted hesitation. How could she advise? Dared she precipitate a meeting with Arthur? Would not this be seeking temptation? for, oh! since that minute's meeting, what *revenants* had haunted her day and night; what feelings had roused in her heart, as if like so many Samsons they had only waited in captivity till time had restored their strength, and they were now ready to overwhelm with ruin both herself and her present lord.

"My cousin will come and see me if he wishes it, Matthew," was all she said, when he asked if she would like him to call first; "and as to Mr. Beck, I really am no judge."

At length, after endless talking, and a great deal more of mental fumbling, Sir Matthew made his call. Anthony Beck met him with cordial



greeting, and asked after Miss Blinkhorn blandly and unconcernedly. He did not refer to Lady Blinkhorn, for Arthur was in the room with an ill-concealed frown upon his swarthy face; but Sir Matthew had no eyes for anything like emotion, and before he left, had gaily and graciously introduced himself to Mr. Lemayne as the husband of his cousin.

“I can answer for it that Lady Blinkhorn will be most happy to see her old playmate, and I flatter myself that when you see her, you will find her as lovely as ever—you must excuse me, I do but quote a general opinion.”

Arthur only bowed.

“I daresay the years that have elapsed since you last saw her have altered her appearance in some respects, for I imagine you did not recognize her in passing the other day. Years tell on us all; but her *eyes*, Mr. Lemayne, her eyes are—undimmed, at least, by sorrow. I may say with the poet:—



"Dear eyes! they have not shed  
A many tears since we were wed."

"No wonder you think yourself fortunate," said Arthur, with a cynical smile, that *did* succeed in putting a stint to the intolerable prattle; for Sir Matthew turned to Mr. Beck, and expressing his eagerness to see them both at Drumchase, began to bow himself out of the room.

"A fine-looking man, your cousin!" was his dinner-table comment that day, "remarkably so; but a reserved character, I judge. I hope we shall see more of him. Beck desires his best compliments to you, Theresa; he was in excellent spirits, and did not forget to ask after the fate of your poor old dog."

The picture of that dog hung on his study wall, dim with the dust of many heedless years. It was sad to him, sometimes, as a remembrancer of a past time, as a witness of wasted feelings in a youthful long ago: and sometimes it was almost odious to his eye, as the chaff of precious grain



foolishly scattered to the winds. But with a kind of tenderness for his old love and old self, he let it hang there still, and looked at it now and then from among his books, with humourous pathos and retrospective curiosity.

Theresa put a wrong construe upon the politeness of her old admirer, and turned to another topic for conversation with nervous haste. She need not have been so careful to hide an unsuspected state of mind, for that the faded valetudinarian could harbour any notion of a prolonged romance about a gentleman she had not seen for twenty years was little likely to occur to any one else. But the remembrance of Anthony Beck's devotion to her was as fresh as if only yesterday he had entreated for a lock of her silky hair—fresher and sweeter than it had been some ten years ago, before that hair began to turn grey, and when other men were urging their suit less ardently.

And she was one of those women who are incre-



dulous of being soon forgotten ; her life had been screened from the wholesome ventilation of plain good sense, and many a frail old cobweb of girlish vanity was hanging about it still.

“Poor Anthony! So he heard of my return and came back too!” she said again to herself, when recalling at night what her brother had told her, with the paraphrase of her own egotism. “He has never married any more than myself; the old scar unhealed!” and then, turning to her maid who was brushing her scanty hair, “I think, Mrs. Priestly, I shall hardly require the poached egg to-morrow; and you may call me half an hour earlier; I feel rather better this evening.”



## CHAPTER XV.

“La fièvre a ses frissons et ses ardeurs ; et le froid montre aussi bien la grandeur de l'ardeur de la fièvre que le chaud même.”  
—PASCAL.

“Contente toi de m'avoir jusqu' icy  
Fermé les yeulx, il est temps que j'y voye  
Et que meshuy, las et honteux je soye  
D'avoir mal mis mon temps et mon soucy.”

ETIENNE DE LA BOETIE.

THE next few days were for Helen, full of sickening suspense ; she was longing to see Arthur, longing for his call as a proof of forgiveness, and as affording, perhaps, some chance of explanation. Yet she was so frightened at her own feelings about him, that if she had known how to prevent seeing him again, she would have thought it her duty to do so. On this account, she would not alter her



usual plan of action, and spent the afternoon out-of-doors driving, or riding, or among her poor people, as regularly as if her heart did not beat thick and fast every day as she re-entered the house with the mixed hope and fear that Arthur might have been during her absence.

Her days were fevered, and her nights restless; sometimes she resolved to write to him and explain all he could not guess, but the joy she felt when beginning to open her heart to his, made her shrink from such confidence with alarm. Besides, Sir Matthew had all the detective curiosity of little minds about her letters, and she could not think it right to begin a correspondence that must be kept from his eye.

She was now so nervously afraid of the least degree of alienation from him, that she more than ever sought to identify their mutual interests: to bring him into all her little schemes, and to occupy herself more earnestly with his. But, meanwhile, the tumult of her feelings was so passionate that



all she had painfully won during the last few years seemed in danger—resignation gone, and faith almost forgotten. “Why am I subjected to this cruel ordeal of having him so near, and yet so infinitely out of reach? Oh! why, when I am trying to be a good wife, is this terrible temptation brought to me? I never sought it; in my inmost heart, I have ever dreaded seeing him again since I married; and now if he comes—if I meet him often! Is *this* the answer to all my prayers *not* to be led into temptation? Oh, why is not Heaven more merciful to our weakness?” For so she prejudged the ways of Providence. She felt as if she was still so very insatiable for earthly happiness, so ceaselessly craving for one hour with Arthur, that no promise of heavenly reward would stir a hope within. “I am not ready for that,” she said to herself, “but I could make him so happy. If but for a few days I might be alone with him I should die happier.”

It was well for her, that memory was vivid and



strong : only in going back to those dreary years between her father's death and her marriage could she find justifying excuse for this last fatal act. Cruel Mrs. Lemayne! How terribly had she misled her by that rumour of Arthur's engagement!

A fortnight passed and neither he nor his friend had called. Hugh was come back for his holidays, and one day after Helen's afternoon drive, he claimed her promise to help him make a particular sort of fly which he wanted for the the next day's fishing; and she was busy with him by the window, tying delicate knots—perhaps for the first time for many days past, not thinking whether Arthur could still call, when he and Mr. Beck, and the young girl she had seen with them before, were shown into the room.

It was late for calling, Mr. Beck remarked, but they had dined early, wishing to have the cooler time of day for showing his niece some of the beautiful views about Drumchase.



"I hope she will come here for a long day, and then I might have the pleasure of taking her to our more distant lions," said Helen with eager rapidity of speech. She fancied that her manner when shaking hands with Arthur had been a complete self-betrayal from its embarrassment, though it was only chilling.

"Thank you, for so kind an offer, but I would not have my little maid trouble anybody," replied Mr. Beck, glancing from under shaggy eyebrows a strong expression of refusal. For several years, he had entertained a prejudice against the woman who had made his friend unhappy, and the prejudices of a man of sixty are not lightly smiled away by lovely looks. And, when he had inquired of Arthur, if he wished to accompany him to Drumchase, the answer, "Yes, I'll come, I want to see what price my fair cousin put upon her affections," did not tell in her favour.

There was a moment's pause, when no one spoke, till she said to Hugh,—



"Just go and tell your brother and sister that Mr. Beck is here; I think you will find them sooner than Jenkyns could."

She had not taken off her bonnet, and as Arthur had seated himself at some little distance off, she could escape the misery of his stern searching look by addressing herself to the young lady; a pleasant simple-mannered girl, who looked about seventeen—white and round as a June lamb, and now very grave, with the demure gravity of a kitten, only waiting for the slightest provocation to return to its graceful frolics.

"Is it your first visit to this part of the world?" Helen asked, and Susan looked at her uncle, having been told not to chatter, before she said,—

"Oh, yes, I'm only lately come to England; I was born in the West Indies."

"My brother's youngest girl," explained Mr. Beck. "He has so many that he was glad to spare me one."



And then followed another silence : all Helen's courage, and tact, and ability failing her till the entrance of her husband and his sister brought relief, making a general stir and talk, during which she could regain her composure. What she said or did she hardly knew, but Arthur was no longer sitting at watch upon her : his eye was fixed on Sir Matthew's jaunty little figure.

As he drew near Drumchase that day, he had noted every advantage of site and landscape with profound resentment, measuring the gains for which, as he believed, Helen had bartered her soul—weighing against his own passionate love and rich intellect the worth of fine property and influential position. The house had an imposing appearance seen from without, and both grandeur and comfort were evident within, but Sir Matthew ! How could it have been ever possible for *her* to endure that chirping plenitude of self-satisfaction ! He now took the opportunity of



shelter from mingled voices at the farther side of the room, to say to her with a cold smile,

"I cannot refrain from congratulating you on the possession of this noble mansion. Such a place must satisfy every wish."

"I have reason to be very thankful for it. I have been homeless."

"But were you not happy at your uncle's?"

"*Happy!*"

Not a word more could be said. Mr Beck was standing up, and Theresa smiling anxiously as she wished him good-day. Arthur and Helen shook hands in silence; no words could have rendered the feelings of either. The meeting which, when contemplated beforehand, she had thought *must* convulse her with its agitations, came in combination with so much that was usual and formal that after the first ten minutes she had perfectly recovered her equilibrium. The meekness of her manner gave it still a kind of majesty in Arthur's eyes; and though



he had been longing to sting her with sarcasms, all his indignation sank before her gentle pleading look. He felt, too, something like pleasure on preceiving that she was not putting on any made-up company manner towards him; that she spoke as simply as she used to speak on the lawn at Fernwick. It seemed almost a loving distinction still. It was the only indulgence left to her with regard to the one who in former years had the trust of her whole nature.

Who, except guardian angels, could have guessed what that half-hour's interview had been to two of the party? And to Theresa it seemed the beginning of a new dawn.

As the visitors were leaving the room, Helen heard Hugh say to her cousin: "I don't know whether you care for fishing, but we have a capital stream for trout; if you do not mind coming so far for it, I should be very glad to show you the best places."

The boy's fancy was taken by the hand-



some cousin and his sturdy white-headed companion.

"Oh, but Mr. Beck knew them long before you did, Hugh," said Theresa with a modest smile, which Helen saw, and attributed to nervous fatigue. But Arthur accepted the invitation, and a day was fixed for a fishing excursion with Hugh. Helen knew when he was expected, and did violence to her wishes by going out in the forenoon, determined to avoid all occasions of meeting. Arthur came to fish ostensibly, but a restless craving to see and know more of her present mode of life was at the bottom of his willingness to come. He had satisfied himself during the first call, that Sir Matthew knew nothing about him, beyond the bare fact of his relationship to, and early intimacy with his wife, and long absence from England. In getting a free entrance to his home there would be no difficulty, and with all his professions of contempt, it was this he sought.

How eagerly he listened for Hugh's least word



bearing upon his sister-in-law; her daily habits, tastes and avocations! How his heart craved for a hundredth part of all the knowledge Hugh could have given him of matters, which from entire ignorance that they could interest, he was silent upon;—he who sat beside her, heard her sweet voice every day, lived within reach of her delightful smile.

Arthur's longing to hear her spoken of, made him almost diplomatic in his talk.

"I suppose," he said, carelessly swinging the net he held, "that your brother does not care for sports Lady Blinkhorn cannot share?"

"Oh, he's too great a muff for anything of the sort," replied the schoolboy. "Helen's fond of fishing, I think. She brings me my luncheon sometimes, and stays to look on." (Ah! so she used for Arthur five summers ago!)

"You don't expect such an honour to-day, I suppose," returned Arthur, seemingly intent upon loosening a knot in his fishing tackle.



"No, the squire wanted her in the forest for an opinion about some opening. I say, Mr. Lemayne, you've dropped your bait!"

With an impetuous fling, Arthur had stridden on, leaving his companion a step or two behind; his teeth set, his hand clenched in a heat of bitter wrath. That fool to have her with him, when all was paradise without, and within hot purgatory, to his soul!—that idiot to be at her side, and be neglected, scorned, repelled!

But the dark mood had a thick disguise of silence, and young Blinkhorn only thought that Mr. Lemayne was eagerly bent on filling his basket betimes.



## CHAPTER XVI.

"Better ends may be in prospect,  
Deeper blisses, if you choose it,  
But this life's end and this love bliss  
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether  
This she felt, as, looking at me,  
Mine and her souls rushed together?"—R. BROWNING.

"Dein Antlitz  
Kann ueber mich nicht gleich die Macht verlieren;  
Die Sinne sind in deiner Banden noch,  
Hat gleich die Seele blutend sich befreyt!"—SCHILLER.

THERESA so often expressed surprise that Helen did not show some hospitality to her cousin and their old friend, that at last Sir Matthew began to think it necessary to ask them to dinner. Helen was so eager to do so that she hesitated, and, on one pretext or another, delayed her invitation.

"It is too far to trouble them to come only for the evening," was her last reason against it.



"My love, you can but leave them to say so; the civility on our part will be the same."

"You won't care to go, I suppose, Lemayne?" said Mr. Beck, when Helen's note reached him; "and Susan and I never care for parties—besides she is too young."

"But Lady Blinkhorn asks me particularly, uncle Tony, and I *do* care."

"Let us all go," said Arthur; "the conversation of a man who meets *her* taste must be worth hearing more of; I am inclined to cultivate his society, I assure you."

"You know best," replied his friend; "but I should have judged differently."

And there was a perturbed frown on his benevolent face, as he wrote to accept the invitation.

"Poor fellow!" thought Theresa; "I knew he would come; men do not forget so easily as they pretend to do."

Conscious that ridicule might mix largely with the sympathy felt by others for the lasting attach-



ment of a woman of forty-five, she hid her feelings with the utmost caution, but they were convulsing her inner life. Did she love less, because she thought that what she had missed and regretted all her grown-up years, was now within possible reach? Did she love less, because now time had taught her that of all treasures love is the dearest and best? No; but she forgot the conditions of life in the *outer* world. Her secret world, with its unclaimed affection and pent in romance, wholly occupied her. "Why," she thought, "should not Anthony love still, as she loved? Why not try to make him happy, late in life as it was? There might be years enough left for enchanting happiness still. Why not?" O blind heart! wake to reality, and see how things stand there. Age, stiffness, impaired features, and formality of demeanour are ineffaceable facts, all saying "impossible" to these wild fancies. Heed them; they speak truth.

There was, indeed, a kind of primness in all



Theresa's adjustments that is, perhaps, more destructive of sentimental interest than any other drawback. The set of the hair, slightly streaked with grey, the carriage of her head and outline of her chin, and the hang of her rich poplins, all forbade any idea of youthful life. And these are the things of which the owner can seldom take full cognizance, and which are made more conspicuous by any attempt to improve appearance.

Since Anthony had been known to be in the neighbourhood, she felt younger and stronger than she had for years known to be. Mrs. Priestly did not know what to think of "missus;" she seemed so brisk and cheerful. She now felt equal to a walk, where before only a carriage could convey her languid bulk, and had actually told her medical man that for the present she believed she might dispense with his tonic mixtures, and need not trouble him to call quite so often.

Once again, thinking it possible that herself and



all her belongings might be seen in a tender light by him she loved, she began afresh to try and soften her relations with those who usually found her dry and cold, who never thought of her except as a peevish invalid. It must have been touching to her guardian spirits to hear her voice soften when she said to her brother, "Matthew, I do not deserve it, I am so often irritable with pain, but will you be so kind as to read me *The Times'* correspondent's letter from Sebastopol (a process he keenly enjoyed, and she generally fled from as soon as it began); or to hear her ask Helen to send her a *clean* child from the school for some patchwork pieces she had been getting ready for a reward. Helen only thought her capricious, or influenced by their clergyman's admirable sermon on lukewarmness. She did not guess any selfish reason.

Selfish, shall we call it?—paltry, or mean? Let those apply such reproachful terms who are sure that when a great joy has come in sight for



them, they have spoken in no gentler tones than they were wont to use in times of bitter heart poverty. Let us call it human nature, and doubt whether we are yet raised far enough above it to contemn.

Theresa and Helen both anxiously anticipated the coming of Mr. Beck and his companions. Helen with a trembling pleasure; Theresa's was more confident. And yet, while dressing for dinner, her spirits had sunk; the looking-glass had plainly broken to her the fact that she was a most unlikely subject for romance; that the business of life, and not its beautiful dreams were now all that remained for her to carry out. This very thought made her look more dyspeptic than usual, and when she found Mr. Beck's rosy niece beside him in the drawing-room, in airy white muslin, and as free from self-consciousness as from jewellery, she felt miserably old.

As she chatted to other guests, Mr. Beck watched her movements with affectionate curiosity



—the curiosity we feel about any one we have once passionately loved. Time had cured the passion, but this peculiar interest remained. The unfortunate thing was, that while the old man was philosophizing upon past emotions, Theresa fancied his attentive eye on the watch to see if they could be on her side renewed.

She sat by him at dinner, and he did not fail to make many a gallant allusion to unforgotten times, now less dear to his tastes than the last edition of *Kant's Critique on Pure Reason*, or assuredly he could not have talked of them so gaily between helping himself to one side-dish, and saying, "No, thank you," to another.

Arthur said very little to the lady beside whom he sat; he was pre-occupied, and narrowly observing Helen. She was unlike what she had been in some respects. The indescribable effects of experience had somewhat altered her manner. When she smiled, he saw that without the least shade of assumption, she knew her smile's worth ;



that when she looked displeased, she knew the weight of her displeasure in the quarter to which it was directed. And yet in the course of that evening he said to himself, "Towards *me* she is unchanged."

A woman to all besides, as this difference of manner betokened, with him alone she seemed still to feel herself a girl. As soon as he addressed her after dinner, a weight of stateliness seemed to slide from her manner, and smiles, and little blushes, and an almost childlike tone of confiding showed how unbroken were the old habits of her youthful days. Talking to him with an easy conscience, for she had not sought the pleasure, she felt as if his mind was to hers like fire to letters written in sympathetic ink.

For years there had been no one who could read what now started into brightness under his comprehensive glance. To him she referred, as if his opinion was law; to him, any little jest was told with half a word, in graceful ease, as if he



must by instinct understand everything she knew, as if in his presence she found again her native air.

But this very simplicity of trust was the last thing the world-worn man could interpret fairly. He called it coquettish, he stiffened his pride by thinking it an effort to lure him back to her allegiance; and the next minute reproached himself for such vile thoughts of an angel, and felt more desperately apart from her than ever.

He was standing beside her, listening to the music of her voice, while she told him her latest accounts from Canada, when Susan Beck came up, and said,—

“Please come and sing with me; uncle Tony says I must, because those ladies asked me, and I want your deep notes to cover slips in mine.”

“But I’m talking to Lady Blinkhorn, Miss Susan.”

“Oh! but do come—I can never get on alone.”

These words passed between them in hurried



under-tones, but Helen heard and seconded the urgent request.

"I should like to hear you sing again," she said, quite simply.

What a cold-blooded saying he thought it! To him it sounded like heartless oblivion of the past. He followed Susan to the instrument, and setting aside several of the songs she took out from her case, chose an old English ballad which they had often practised together during the last few weeks, taking alternate verses, and joining in chorus.

ÆNONE.—Fair and fair, and twice so fair,  
As fair as any may be,  
The fairest shepherd on our green,  
A love for any lady.

PARIS.—Fair and fair, and twice so fair,  
As fair as any may be,  
Thy love is fair for thee alone,  
And for no other lady.

ÆNONE.—My love is fair, my love is gay,  
And fresh as bin the flowers in May,  
And of my love my roundelay,  
My merry, merry roundelay,  
Concludes with Cupid's curse:



They that do change old love for new,  
Pray gods they change for worse!

CHORUS.—Fair and fair, and twice so fair, etc.

ÆNONE.—My love can pipe, my love can sing,  
My love can many a pretty thing;  
And of his lovely praises sing  
My merry, merry roundelays.

Amen to Cupid's curse :  
They that do change old love for new,  
Pray gods, they change for worse!

BOTH.—Fair and fair, and twice so fair, etc.\*

Several people standing near the piano admired the air, and the slight texture of the verse, not overcharged with meaning, as many modern songs are; and another lady took Susan's place, and began a piece of instrumental music, whilst a consequent discussion on modern verse went on. Helen took no part in it, though close by.

"I should like to look again at the words of that song, Arthur," she said, startling him with a light touch of her bouquet on his folded arm.

\* George Peele : 1584.



"Can you find me the place in Miss Beck's book?"

How white her cheek while so speaking! The pearls on her neck, the dead white of her silk dress hardly whiter; but not the slightest trace of agitation in her voice. It was he who seemed confused, as he held the book and pointed to the page.

"You admire these words," she said, smiling, lest she should excite the curiosity of bystanders by a more serious manner. "They are pretty—very;—but, Arthur, I *never* got your message the day you left us; and you never had one from me that I sent. I never knew that you were going so early, till you were gone——"

"Mercy told you."

"Never."

"Good God! you speak truth?"

For an instant, they looked at each other with an overwhelming throng of feelings that made both speechless, and then he went on with accents almost fiercely hurried.



"But *your* message—your message to me, what was it?

"Oh! that is now quite out of date; no need to know it now. My husband is trying to catch your eye, for Mr. Beck is waiting for you. Good-night."

She was now flushed, and her leave-taking was cold and repressive. Theresa also wished her old friend good-by with less effusion than would have been natural to her half an hour earlier in the evening. As she expected, he sat down in the arm-chair nearest to her, and engaged her in conversation with all the suavity of an old-fashioned gentleman. He asked about her foreign movements, and showed a delicate interest in the places they had both visited on the Continent, but just as she was proving, by the accuracy of her remembrance, that she could not have left Vienna till a full fortnight after he said he had arrived there, she became aware of his being fast asleep. He had kept himself in an attitude of attention as long



as he possibly could, but nature in a man of sixty years old, on a sultry evening after dinner, could not be coerced any longer. After half an hour's listening, he succumbed to drowsiness, and did not hear the end of her story.



## CHAPTER XVII.

“Le grand malheur de la laideur, c'est qu'elle éteint et qu'elle ensevelit le mérite des femmes ; on ne va point chercher dans une figure disgraciée les qualités de l'esprit et du cœur.”—  
MADAME DE LAMBERT.

“Many years  
Have since flowed in between us, and our minds  
Both silent to each other,—at this time  
We live as if those hours had never been.”

WORDSWORTH.

NEITHER mercy nor justice have any part in a man's natural feelings towards a woman whom he thinks he once loved too well. Old associations may endear her memory, but it does not follow that he will find her presence agreeable when all fascination is at an end.

Anthony Beck had been a little bored by his



old idol that evening, and there were people in the room whom he would have preferred chatting with,—lively, bright faces that would have kept his eyes open longer, had not a respectful kindness led him to show such attentions to Theresa as their early attachment might have led any sensible woman to expect. But they were irksome to him, and he had wished that she, too, was musical.

It gives a disagreeable strain to manner for the mind to try and make up for bodily defects. Theresa had talked well, but her ideas were not fresh, and her opinions were too decisive, too trite and firm in their maturity, to have much interest for the speculative man; and the less there is of feminine grace, the more play is given to strong judgment—seldom pleasing from a woman's mouth. And, besides, she was a little too condoling about his rheumatism when he spoke of it as the cause of his having gone to Germany for its baths.



Human nature is not over wise even at sixty; and if she had been pretty and attractive, it might have pleased him to have his crippled fingers so softly touched by a lady's—without half Theresa's rings upon them. As it was, he did not care to have such a fuss of pity and surprise. She would certainly have pleased him much more if she could have felt less solicitous of pleasing—

But there never was resurrection day  
In the world for a love so dead as that \*

of his had become. It was not a case where there was any room for belated explanations. There was nothing to explain. Her pride, the cause of their alienation in past years, was still as evident in face and manner; and though now not inclining her to repel him, it was a very sufficient means of making her character repugnant to his wiser age.

If we have any key to her self-distrust, we

\* Phoebe Carey.



never feel the piteousness of ugliness more than when a plain woman tries to show tender emotion; but, if we think her unconscious of her loss, it seems sheer affectation for a stringy face to put on melting looks. Mr. Beck, with all his good-nature and chivalry of feeling, thought it so; and “why *does* she wear all that frippery on her head?” was his secret wonder.

She had put on and worn with suffering taste a very remarkable head-dress, partly suspecting that its youthful elegance was unbecoming to elderly features and time-worn complexion, but yet she felt a little injured when Helen observed, the next morning, that the style of one she usually wore was preferable.

Her inward efforts at re-juvenescence were now pathetic or ridiculous, according to the light in which they were viewed. From having habitually been over-doing invalidship, she now surprised Helen by the feats she endeavoured to perform; and, instead of wondering that people would



expect so much from her, she all of a sudden betrayed no little annoyance at being treated like a *fainéante*.

Helen had no clue to her state of mind, but she pitied its evident discomposure. She would have pitied still more tenderly, had she understood what was going on within that disappointed heart. Like one in a trance who hears himself spoken of as dead while still terribly conscious, she observed that her heart was in one respect considered unquestionably dead while thrilling with all the passion of her vehement nature,—that no one, not even the kindest, suspected her of feeling this revival of an old love; and, like the patient in a trance, she was morally incapacitated for giving any sign of its life.

Sometimes, fearing lest her feminine dignity should mislead the object of all her thoughts, she almost resolved to tell Helen; and then, getting off the sofa with the vigorous movement of one all at once taking a bold resolution, she



would look at her face in the glass; and, seeing how faded and aged that unmistakeable index was, she would sit down again with returning languor, overcome by the sense of the absurd, and burying her eyes against a cushion, groan out one of those wordless complaints to infinite compassion which arise from infinite need.

The day but one after he had dined at Drumchase, Arthur called at Drumchase in the forenoon. He had had no rest since Helen had told him what partly excused her conduct, but he felt unforgiving still. He deeply resented her attachment to another, whether it were weak or strong; and scorned the attempt she made (according to his suspicious fancy) to win him back again. These two states of feeling, which he alternately supposed her to be guilty of, were manifestly incompatible; yet his jealousy kept them both in view, ready to torment itself with either, according to the probabilities of the moment.



He asked for Lady Blinkhorn, and found her alone, quietly at work in a library scented with the beds of heliotrope which were under its many windows. She looked as sweet and calm as they in her delicate lilac muslin; and for some minutes he was at a loss to find an excuse for getting below the surface-drift of small talk with which they began.

“Do you know Hawthorne’s works?” he asked, rather abruptly.

“Only his first.”

“I have just been reading one of his stories in which he speaks of a woman who had ‘lost her feelings among the accidents of life.’”

This he said with a sardonic smile; her slight fingers trembled as she quickened the play of the needle, and asked, in lower tones than his, if Hawthorne had described how a man might lose all pity?

“Not that I know of. Why should he? Every poor devil knows that, who once—I have but to



remind you of a certain conversation between us two in the lime avenue."

Helen drew from her bosom a locket, glass on both sides, which contained the broken jet cross; and only said, as she held it up,—

"But I have kept this all the time, Arthur!"

"Ay—broken."

"Your mother led me to believe you were engaged to some one else."

"Then she told you a falsehood, and one which, apparently, you were not slow to act upon. Helen!—Helen! think how it might have been, but for that—but for your—Psha! I am making a fool of myself." And though the veins were swelling on his brow, a hot tear flashed in each eye, despite the proud will that longed to stay it back. But he could no longer guide his broken choking accents, and tried to substitute for them a harsh defying laugh, till sufficiently recovered to urge another shaft at the heart that was writhing under his lash, and then he added,



"I can only hope you find your religious principles less flexible than your feelings seem to be."

"Arthur, forbear! You are cruel. I treated you ill,—but, oh! I misjudged; I was in error, not in fault, *then*. Oh! dear old friend of happier times, if you knew why I acted as I have done since,—if I *could* tell you, you would pity, and not blame."

"Have you had any pity on me?"

Helen was silent; she dared not trust herself to say what she had felt for him, how she *had* loved, how she feared lest she should still love; but coming close to him, as he sat with his head bowed on the back of a chair in front of him, she said under her breath,—

"Arthur, when I prayed God to forgive the wrong I had done, I prayed that you might forgive me too. Will you refuse my petition? I believe—nay, I am sure—that our Lord did not reject it, for I feel His pardon in my soul; but you,



dearest friend always, will not *you* forgive me too?"

Men must know instinctively how terrible a sight it is to see them weep, for *they* conceal their tears as long as it is possible; but Helen knew that Arthur's were now falling fast, and she touched his hand, hanging down listlessly, while the other hid his face; and as he wrung her hand in strong emotion, as she saw his shoulder heave, she felt answered, and went on, trembling, but courageous.

"And, Arthur, remember, this lost, broken life is not all; we have eternal life before us—already begun. In this world, we must live apart, for each a *separate* lot; but let us meet *there*, made perfect."

"No hope for me there! Oh! Helen, you blessed one, you little dream what a sinner you speak to!"

"But that is *no* reason for despair. *I* hope; and what could be worse than my faithlessness



and ingratitude? Oh, Arthur, all that terrible Trouncer time made me often think that God did not care for me; and so I accepted a wretched pretence of happiness, instead of going on trusting in His mercy and wisdom. Oh! nothing could be much worse than doubting *His* love. Do not be like me in distrusting His power to save you from everything, even sin."

He was calmer now, and had a solemn question on his lips, when the sound of creaking footsteps arrested it; and she took up her work again, and he rose and went to the window, both of them trying to bring back common-place impressions.

Sir Matthew came tiptoeing in with an air of bustling alacrity

"My love, I want you. Oh! Mr. Lemayne, how d'ye do? Very glad to see you. Mr. Beck quite well, I hope, and the young lady? You will excuse my interruption—business of importance. I want my dear wife's opinion about an alteration in the park: that new stile, my dear



Helen,—we await your final decision. *I* incline to the figure of V, but I think you raised some objection to that; you named Mrs. Brown (our housekeeper, Mr. Lemayne) as an obstacle. I grant it: when we regard stiles from *her* point of view, a V is not commodious to a woman of her dimensions; but, on the other hand, a stile is a more permanent arrangement than a housekeeper at an advanced age."

"I will come without delay," said Helen, hopeless of detaching him from his trivial talk, if she lingered.

Arthur heard it with a bitter relish; but now he had a sympathetic glance towards Helen, to see how she bore it; while his frown interpreted to her contempt for the *business*, and surprise that she did not despatch it with a message only. He little knew the nature to which she was subordinated.

With her usual grace, she remarked, smiling good-humouredly,—



"My cousin wonders, I daresay, at your thinking my opinion on the spot so indispensable."

"Oh! my dear sir" (poising himself in his favourite attitude of declamation), "it is my unfailing principle, to do nothing without the full concurrence of my dear wife. Affection like ours requires consentaneous will in all things."

"Well then pray come, for I am going," interposed Helen. "Perhaps you can give us a valuable hint on this stile question," she added, turning to Arthur.

"Thank you, I must be going now. I could only think of that stile we used to rest on at the bottom of your clover field lang syne. Good day."

And then, with stiff bows to Sir Matthew, and not even shaking her hand, he closed the door behind him.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

“Yet this pain

Ye took in meekness, nor of outward woe  
Made much account that knew a subtler foe,  
A sorer strife, a plague-spot lying bare  
To one calm eye, and fain ye would be fair  
To meet that only eye; so faint, yet still  
Pursuing, oft ye looked unto the hill,  
From thence expecting aid, and not in vain.”

DORA GREENWELL.

“Nought now

Is left but trust in God, who tries the heart,  
And saves it, at the last, from its own ruin.”

*Festus.*

SIR MATTHEW liked his wife's cousin: it was flattering to find such a clever man so good a listener: he would stand silent, with folded arms, and seldom intersperse a syllable of his own, beyond yes or no; and it escaped the old



prattler's observation that Helen was present whenever this was the case.

Arthur never seemed to feel the six miles between Mr. Beck's house and Drumchase any distance; on one excuse or other, he was constantly riding over. But how different from what she had expected was the effect of such frequent intercourse upon Helen. What she had feared as temptation proved her strongest safeguard. By moral disorders, he had impaired his spirit's force; while she had risen to a purer spiritual atmosphere, he had miserably sunk, and could no longer answer to her ideas of manly excellence. She did not distinctly recognize the change, but she wondered that now she could not feel the influence of his nature upon hers as she used. His opinions had of old weighed with her like the verdict of an oracle; now she mistrusted them often. She heard the whisper of self-indulgent wishes in many of his theories; missed the delicate checks of conscience in his plan of



life; the indescribable stamp of religious purpose in his face: she pitied him tenderly, but she could not so highly esteem. In spiritual life, she had passed beyond his sphere of thought and feeling, and therefore he had lost the power of swaying her mind or agitating her heart. This naturally made her less apprehensive with regard to him: we easily, often rashly, attribute to another the securities of our own position. But though no longer her ideal, he was still an object of truest affection. With him, on the contrary, she was more than ever both the one and the other; more than ever, as he told himself, *necessary* to him.

He lived on recklessly, hoping he knew not what. The death of Sir Matthew was the only chance he dared name to himself in connection with Helen. He would not believe it possible that she should love her husband; that, sooner or later, she would not be cured of such a horrible delusion, and at last—at last be his.



At times he felt as if all that stood between him and her was a mere cobweb of formal restraints, of which such a passion as his need take no heed; he would break through it, he would speak, he would claim the love which he felt sure *must* still be his. He only thought thus when he was far from her: in her presence these rash imaginations of evil became impossible. It was not that her dignity awed, or her perfect sincerity rebuked them; but they vanished in the pure atmosphere which always seemed to surround her. Far from pointedly keeping him at a distance, she increased her cordiality of manner as she more and more submitted herself to the bonds of duty. To many women it would have been hazardous; she, having no human counsellor to whom she could trust for guidance in this perilous path, was looking up for Divine aid as constantly as the child looks up to its father for direction in unknown ways. In the perfect love of liberty she strove to walk, and



found peace where she had long given up the hope of happiness.

It was evident, even to Arthur's moody eye, that the conflict which occasionally left an expression of anguish on her beautiful countenance was not a conflict of conscience, but the renewal of a hard struggle for total resignation. It was clear that no human eloquence would avail to loosen her hold upon the duties of her joyless life: they were her property till the day when she should be called to give an account of their discharge, and the idea of flying from them had never crossed her loyal heart. It was her daily effort to prevent her husband from even guessing that they could be irksome; and if ever Arthur forgot himself so far as to express impatience at Sir Matthew's presence, Helen was sure to check him, as she only could, without the slightest tinge of reproof, but effectually.

For example, one day, as they were walking together in the garden, Arthur cried out, "Oh!



here comes Sir Matthew! what a pity he cannot take a turn down the avenue before he interrupts us; I wanted to tell you more about that wreck off Sydney."

But as soon as the intruder overtook them, Helen took his arm, and quietly asked her cousin to go on with his story.

"I was wanting you, Matthew: Arthur is just going to tell me of a wreck he witnessed some time ago."

"Pray proceed, Mr. Lemayne; you will find me all attention."

But Arthur was sulky; and, looking at his watch, said that he could stay no longer, that the story would do to tell another time. So it was that, after spending any length of time with her, alone or with others, Arthur used to leave her, baffled and angry; yet, in the depths of his soul, more and more subdued by admiration of her simple and elevating rectitude of conduct.

"What an angel that woman is!" he once broke



out to his old friend ; “and what a saint she might have made me, had she but waited, and let me be her husband !”

“ Ay, my good friend, very possibly ; but think you that he who is made saint or hero by love of a woman, has the strength or goodness of him who has become what he ought to be by the grace of God and his own persevering obedience ? Eternity is very long : God only knows what we shall meet with there—more, perhaps, than joy-made virtue could stand. God knew when He let this grief come upon you.”

This was quite a long profession of faith for Anthony, who seldom dropped many words of a directly religious tendency in conversation with Arthur, though he was giving the most anxious consideration to his unwholesome frame of mind. His piety produced a calmness of faith which waited long and patiently for the remedial measures of Providence ; which made him more ready to pray for the sinner than to speak vehemently



about suspected sin. In his youth, he had known the madness of passion; he could not now rebuke it as a folly easily to be overcome; but, in his own fashion, he was doing his utmost to bring Arthur to a sounder state of feeling.

At the distance Anthony Beck had lived from the gay world, during the last ten years, it appeared very unattractive; and, apart from his notions of duty, he wished to think ill of it, so as to justify his own exclusive devotion to more abstracted studies than commerce with the world allows. But his beloved seclusion ill-suited a young girl's ideas of happiness; and she was always telling Arthur how tiresome it was of uncle Tony not to have any visiting society.

"But he has now, at Drumchase," replied he one day. "Why don't you get him to ask the people there to dine here? You know he really ought, and *he* probably forgets all about it."

The suggestion was delightful, and Susan flew into her uncle's study. He was sitting writing,



with a pile of books scattered about the table and floor beside him. His glance, as she entered, seemed to have as little to do with the common thoughts of humanity, as the sunlight which falls from high windows to the floor of an empty church looks like common daylight. Living, as he did, among recondite ideas, it was indescribable how unimportant all practical concerns appeared to him at any time; and now he was completely absorbed.

"Can they come to dinner, did you say, child? Of course, if they drive over in time, and you tell cook to dress dinner enough: tell them so, if you like, but don't trouble me now, and don't go and chatter with Lemayne either; for I want him to master that lecture of Hamilton's."

But Arthur was Susan's very good friend; and before he troubled himself with Sir William Hamilton's philosophy, he helped her to write her invitation, mended her pen, supplied phrases, and saw her safe through the pretended



difficulty of addressing a note to the wife of a baronet.

“My uncle hopes that you will all come and dine here next Monday, if it is fine; for the hay is out all round the house, and we think you will find that pleasant,” was Susan’s inartificial formula, to which her counsellor would not allow her to add any stiff phrase of conventional politeness. Naturally enough, neither of them thought of naming Miss Blinkhorn expressly. But for Theresa this was a terrible omission, cutting to the heart; and nothing that Helen could say would induce her to believe herself sufficiently asked by the inclusive *all* of Miss Beck’s note.

Sir Matthew urged her going; but his sister at last begged that the subject might not again be mentioned to her, (poor thing! she fancied this dignity!); and, when Monday came, was not extant downstairs.

She suffered in body, as, perhaps, all do in some degree, when her mind was displeased;



but, in her case, annoyance immediately sheltered itself behind some bodily ailment. And she was, therefore, inclined to exact pleasure-giving from companions as her only chance of escaping pain. Let doctors decide how far such pain is to be escaped by more fortitude and self-control.

Mr. Beck's dinner-hour, like all his other domestic arrangements, was primitive—as early as five o'clock. He loved the midsummer twilight, and would not have dreamed of altering it for the reception of a queen. Sir Matthew fumed about this a little as he drove off with Helen in the afternoon; but, seeing her look pleased, when she told him that she found Mr. Beck's originality charming, he began to like the variety also. Certainly, he had found no disappointment in his second marriage: every day of his life he delighted in it more and more. His self-occupied nature did not know how much it *could* love till he had lived with Helen two years.



When she first saw Mr. Beck's small house, June was making all England very fair, and this little spot of earth was glowing with summer beauty. A prim strip of garden ground, divided by two gravel walks, straight down and transverse, lay like a jewel in the midst of fields. The setting of a grey-green desert of outspread hay was a lovely foil to all its brilliant colours; and beyond the hay-field, on one side, rose fern-covered hills, and, on the other, a quiet village was sweet with the breath of cottage gardens, and silent in evening repose.

"How lovely and calm it all looks!" cried Helen to her husband, as they stepped out of the small drawing-room upon the minute lawn. "I think I see Arthur, and Mr. Beck in the field, at the end of the walk. Oh, Matthew, how came it that you never brought me to see him before?"

"He was away, my love, during your first year; but if I could have anticipated your admiration of a domain so humble—indeed, no



one would have supposed it possible in the owner of Drumchase—I should certainly have obtained permission to show it to you in Mr. Beck's absence."

"Domain! No, it's a charming morsel of complete peacefulness and home comfort. No wonder Arthur likes staying here so long. Look at those roses. We have no such profusion; and there is the dear old flag and red lychnis. I have a vulgar taste for those old-fashioned flowers; we used to have them in our garden, Mercy and I."

As she spoke, Mr. Beck and her cousin came up, and for a few seconds she felt suddenly carried back to childhood by strong associations; to the times when Arthur used to be hard at work gardening with her, and she and Mercy used to say to the now tall man, "Take the small water-pot, please, Arthur; the great one is too heavy even for you;" or, "Don't run under my rose-tree, your cap knocked off a bud yesterday." The sheaves of purple blossom in the sword-lily, the French grass,



the thick-clustered campanula, and sturdy sweet-william stood round her like spirits of the past, and seemed to say, "Cannot you too be gay, and all given up to summer joy with us?"

"Arthur," she said, turning away from the others, "how those dear old flowers talk of Fernwick, do they not?"

"Yes, and almost drive me wild with their scents. Nothing stabs the heart with memories so much as scent."

A flight of swifts passed close over their heads with a scream, and he did not hear the sigh that answered his remark. He saw a minute later that she smiled when Mr. Beck said the dinner-bell was ringing, and heard her say that she was quite ready for it, and in his heart he called her unfeeling. Had she given expression to a tithe of what she felt, she would have been heartless indeed.

He seldom thought now of any heart but his own; he had cherished his own sorrow, till he



learned to think no one else had any sorrow to compare with it.

How sweetly Helen behaved in his old friend's tiny rooms, and how delightfully she reassured little Susan by all her feminine arts of implied compliment! The happy girl felt quite proud of her position at the head of her uncle's table, and was so eager to help Sir Matthew to the finest strawberries, that she did not notice that she had overthrown a glass of wine with her sleeve, or that her kind friend, Mr. Lemayne, was quietly removing, as well as might be, the effects of the accident with his d'oyley and dinner-napkin.

"But your white muslin has not altogether escaped, Miss Susan," he said; "let me have this piece of your voluminousness to deal with in my finger-glass, or you will have a stain."

"Oh, thank you: uncle Tony, it *will* come out; don't mind, I shall not want a new one."

The anxious look with which this was said



amused Helen; and her host, seeing her laugh, said,—

“ You need not pity her, Lady Blinkhorn; the careless puss knows very well that her allowance of white frocks is already exceeded. I suspect Lemayne has something to do with it. She seems to think that he must be so used to fine dressing among the diggers, that it would be impossible to let him see her in anything less pretty than white muslin.”

“ I quite appreciate the kindness,” said Arthur, carelessly, dabbling the stained inch with unfeigned attention.

“ And you *know* you like them yourself, uncle Tony,” retorted Susan, her eyes a shade bluer, and her cheeks a little hotter than usual.

It was a pleasant evening to them all, spent out-of-doors, wandering about the hay-field till tea was ready on the lawn. Mr. Beck was a man who knew how to draw some interesting facts even from Sir Matthew’s verbose talk; and never



had Helen's mind won so much of Arthur's intellectual admiration as it did in conversation with her during the solemn hush of a starlit hour after tea.

Susan wanted to join them, but was held by a monologue of Sir Matthew's over his last cup of tea, and she could not politely move. But had she been at Arthur's side, Helen could not have told him so much of her life during his absence from England. Its circumstances, more than her past feelings, were all she thought it right to tell; and Arthur would not have said what he did about his difficulties of faith, his wilder speculations, and esoteric belief. Helen heard them without seeming shocked, and brought forward opposing arguments very gently. Since they had last disputed on such themes, her insight had been enlarged; and now her familiarity with the books from which he drew some of his most startling ideas gave her the new power of meeting him on his own ground.



Because she could now admire what was admirable in his favourite unorthodox writers, he could hear her contest their errors with patience and respect. She did not know how much her sounder views won upon him; it was the last thing her humility inclined her to expect.

But Susan's white figure was gliding across the garden towards them, and before she was within hearing, Helen said,—

“That little woman seems to me to have a heart worth winning, Arthur.”

“Very likely; but I know of no one who wants to win it.”

“If I was a man, I am sure I should.”



## CHAPTER XVIII.

“Wie des Mondes Abbild zittert  
In den wilden Meereswogen,  
Und er selber still und sicher  
Wandelt an dem Himmelsbogen,

“Also vandelst du, Geliebte,  
Still und sicher, und es zittert  
Nur dein Abbild mir im Herzen  
Weil mein eignes Herz erschüttert.”

H. HEINE.

ARTHUR could not stay at Mr. Beck's indefinitely, though his old friend pressed him to do so, on condition that he *really* devoted his mornings to a course of philosophical study, and did not want to ride over to Drumchase more than once a fortnight.

He would accept no such terms, for his mother was getting impatient to see him in the comfort-



able home he had provided for her, not many miles distant from Richard's. "She will find him more of a comfort," he had said with a sigh when applying for the house in question. She was longing to make him happy in it, as far as she could, and wondering what could detain him so many weeks at Mr. Beck's.

Arthur's sense of duty had been insensibly quickened by Helen's example; he knew well what she would have urged him to do, if she chose to exert her influence with him, and accept the office of monitor, instead of so carefully abstaining from giving him advice. She had learned from the tragedy of her life how hazardous an experiment this may be; she had learned to believe that more good is done to another soul by prayer than by remonstrance.

Yet he read her thoughts, and it sweetened the pain of leaving her neighbourhood; he would not trust himself to say good-by, but went away without even telling her of his intentions two days



after she had dined at Mr. Beck's house. Perhaps with this measure of caution and self-control, there mixed a weak desire to make her feel his absence; to fix her thoughts upon him by curiosity or pique, if he could occupy them in no dearer way. He misjudged a character singularly free from vanity. Helen missed him indeed; the loss of his frequent visits made a blank in her life; but she was vexed with herself for feeling it, applauded him in her own mind, and rejoiced to think that he was so far cured as to dispense with a final interview.

She knew less of his plans than Susan did. "Are you going away quite, Mr. Lemayne?" she said when he wished her good-by. "Why do you? Uncle Tony wants you to live with us."

"But my old mother wants me, Miss Susan; if September is fine, I hope to come back for some shooting."

"Oh! do come back, whether it is or not; we shall want you worse if it rains."



Arthur laughed, and promised himself to be as independent of weather as the good-natured girl desired, but he would not say so.

In the middle of August, when Drumchase was full of visitors, Sir Matthew became so unwell as to be unable to leave his room. The symptoms were not serious at first, but they baffled the doctor's skill; and when fever began to be suspected, the visitors were all considerate enough to relieve poor Lady Blinkhorn from the duties of hospitality. Her husband was very ill; further advice was wished for, and two physicians of note came from a distance for consultation.

On the last day of August, when Arthur reached the railway station nearest to Mr. Beck's, he saw the Blinkhorn livery on the platform, and went up to ask the man-servant how they all were at Drumchase.

"Sir Matthew slept half-an-hour this morning, sir; the fever runs very high, and the doctor says he's most critical."



It was the first intimation of the illness that had reached him. Mr. Beck had been careful not to mention it.

“And Lady Blinkhorn?” he asked, after hearing all about the illness.

“Well, sir; as well as we can expect; the carriage is waiting for another opinion from London; we expect a gentleman down by next train.”

What a terrible commotion the news awakened in Arthur's feelings! what a tumult of hopes that dared not fully express themselves! He gave the man half-a-crown; begged him to send over to Mr. Beck's early the next morning to say how his master passed the night, and what the London physician thought of the case—began to send a message to his cousin, and then broke off, remarking that she must be too anxious now to brook any disturbance.

The suppressed excitement of Arthur's manner surprised the phlegmatic official, but he under-



stood the use of money well enough, and promised to let him know how the baronet was next day.

That night was the third in which he had been delirious. Helen had scarcely left his bedside for a week; she was looking worn and pale, but very calm, when Theresa wished her good-night, and once more entreated her to let her watch while she slept in another room.

"I could not sleep, dear Theresa, thank you. Good night; don't stay; and don't grudge me what may be—Oh! but I will not believe it hopeless yet. Dr. Maurice said there *was* hope if he got over the night. See! he lies in a little quieter attitude now."

But Theresa had not left the room many minutes before the quick distressed talking of the unconscious patient began again. Helen was alone with him, having sent the nurse down to take some refreshment; and she knelt beside his pillow, in the dim-lighted room, holding his



parched hand and covering his burning forehead with soft kisses.

"*Too narrow!*" he cried out, raising a shrill thin voice plaintively—"too narrow and small, and unsuitable for her; I knew it from the first; I could see that she never, never liked such a cramping position; *never*, I say, though she took pains not to let me know. Too narrow and small for her,—so paltry and unlike herself!"

And she, catching with delight at the first gleam of coherent thought, answered it, as she believed, saying in gentlest, re-assuring tones, "Oh, my dear husband, you mistake. I do not find anything irksome now; and you have been tenderly kind to me always. It was ungrateful of me ever—oh! do not think of anything omitted; you were ever good to me ——"

But the same cry was reiterated faster and faster, till it became a querulous gabble in which all sense was lost, and only the words "too narrow," "unsuited for her," were audible.



"Law, my lady!" said the nurse, when she re-entered the room, "how he do go on about that there carriage! Poor dear man! his mind seems to run on it incessant."

"The carriage!—I don't understand."

"Well, mum, nor did I till I told Jenkyns downstairs, at supper, and then he explains: he tells us master was so upset when the new brougham came home, to find the seat narrower than he thought you would like. He mayn't have named it to your ladyship, but Jenkyns says he was always a fretting over it with Thomas, when he came to the speech of him about the horses and such like."

Two successive afternoons Arthur rode over to inquire. There was a shade of improvement announced on the second; and "Lady Blinkhorn sends her love and thanks for kind inquiries," was the message added on the third day to the servant's report—a message which gave her cousin more idea of the revival of *hope* about



Sir Matthew's recovery than any medical bulletin could. She must be in happier spirits before she could say what would take that form of expression in a servant's mouth. And yet how should Arthur believe that it was indeed the hope of her inmost heart? The fourth day Mr. Beck walked over to Drumchase with him. Her brother was so decidedly better, that Miss Blinkhorn sent word to beg that they would come in. How tedious Arthur found her details of improved symptoms! How needlessly often did she tell them of dear Helen's beautiful resignation when hope was almost extinct, and her thankful gladness now! "Woman's talk! fudge!" was his secret comment on her words. "I *can't* believe anything so preposterous as that."

Mr. Beck's compassionate interest in their recent anxieties was so soothing to Theresa, that she did perhaps rather needlessly amplify her narration; and still Helen did not come in, though



Arthur knew she had been told of their call, for Theresa had left her to join them. And at last Mr. Beck rose to go, with his usual unsentimental cordiality, and not an imaginable trace of personal concern for *her* share in nursing the sick brother: but only a lover *could* have thought it much.

“Ah!” she mused, as both gentlemen left the room, “if I had but met him five years ago, before I had begun to wear caps, and before these wretched new teeth had so altered my looks!” and as she turned towards the glass opposite, she met a face looking incurably wrinkled, and sighed. It *was* impossible.

Poor Theresa! how long was the struggle in her heart between reality and ideality! How often did she forswear her deceiving images of herself in unattainable happiness! How often again borrow tints and unexpected turns of events from fancy, and weave a web of beautiful possibilities in sight of her ever-hungry heart, which the least word or



look from a bystander could rend at once to complete annihilation!

The combat between good sense and wildest hope was long, and to the last deadly. Hope fell after many a seeming death; it fell, wounded so sorely that it could never rise again; it fell, and this world offered her no other glimpse of its lost Paradise, but went on treating her as if she was as old and quiet-hearted as she looked.

Even in the glorious September of 1855, there were chilly nights; and the evening of that same day, Arthur sat by Mr. Beck's dining-room fire, with the never-failing cigar, which only such a friend could have allowed indoors. Between tempestuous puffs, he was telling some of the adventures of his Australian life. Anthony listened in profound attention, gazing first at the wood-fire, and then at his friend's face, now animated by vivid remembrance. Susan, in white dress, with no ornament except her own bright hair, stood beside her uncle, with both hands laid on his



arm, and her whole face intent on what she was hearing.

When the crisis of the last story came—about a poor digger who had lost all his nuggets just when he was expecting his wife and child from England—Mr. Beck turned round to Susan, and said, rather sharply (for she had pressed his arm against the chair it rested on, a little too hard in her excitement),—

“Why do you stand there, Susie? have you no work this evening? You should not keep on staring so at Lemayne; it isn’t pleasant.”

“Oh, but I like to *see* him tell his stories, uncle Tony; and *you* don’t mind, do you?” she added, waving her small head towards Arthur, with the most coaxing tone of voice.

Arthur’s moustache curled enough for the smile of assent to be understood.

“Then go on, please; we’re quite comfortable now—are we not, uncle? When the poor fellow got down to the harbour?”



"When the passengers came out, one of the stewards had hold of a little fellow about the age of his own boy; but the father passed him by, seeking out his wife everywhere in the crowd. Soon he heard some one say, 'Any one about here of the name of Longridge?' and darting towards the spectators, he cried out,—

"'Here you are! I'm John Longridge, and I'm come for my wife, who took her passage in the *Dryope*; she's got a little 'un with her.'

"'Not now,' said the steward; 'she was took ill on the way, and I'm sorry for ye; but she told me to give you the child and her love, and say as how you was to take it back to England, and let her sister rear him.'"

Arthur paused; and Susan bent her head down till tears were hidden from the light.

Presently he went on:—

"I found him, the next day, in blank despair—totally broken down; he could not speak, nor



look up; and I hardly spoke either. What could I say to comfort any one?"

He had addressed Anthony, but Susan answered,—

"Oh, why didn't you tell him how much God loved him still?"

"He *could* not have believed it then. Some men cannot believe it half their lives, Miss Susan."

"Then they have no Bibles to tell them, perhaps; if they had, they *must*, you know."

"Hold your tongue, child," said her uncle; "you speak of things above your reach."

It sounded a rough check; but as he so spoke, his arm was put round her, and she nestled her head upon his shoulder, in reply, and gazed still harder while asking, with lowered voice,

"But, Mr. Lemayne, what did you *do* for him?"

"Oh, I had been a successful digger: I made a rich man of him, so far as money goes, and



brought him home. The little boy took a great fancy to me, and made me promise to come and see him in his old-country home."

"Oh, *do*; and let me come with you, Mr. Le-mayne. Uncle Tony will give me something to make him frocks with, and then we will take them, and make him so glad!"

Arthur looked at her, as she thus spoke, with meditative fixity of eye; and before she could speak again, Mr. Beck bade her run away and make tea, and stay in the drawing-room till they joined her.



## CHAPTER XIX.

“ Qu’ importe que la vie, inégale ici bas  
Pour l’homme et pour la femme,  
Se dérobe et soit prête à rompre sous vos pas ?  
N’avez-vous pas votre âme ?

“ Votre âme qui bientôt fuira peut-être ailleurs  
Vers les régions pures,  
Et vous emportera plus loin que nos douleurs,  
Plus loin que nos murmures !

“ Soyez comme l’oiseau posé pour un instant  
Sur des rameaux trop frêles,  
Qui sent ployer la branche et qui chante pourtant,  
Sachant qu’il a des ailes.”—VICTOR HUGO.

SIR MATTHEW’S recovery was slow, and for many weeks precarious. It was not till October came, that his doctors spoke confidently about him: they told Helen that long-standing internal disease had complicated the case, and that even should strength return, the utmost care would be necessary for



some time to come. Her devotedness as a nurse was remarkable to every one but herself. That so young and lovely a woman should prefer shutting herself up day after day of golden harvest weather in the hot bedroom of a peevish invalid, to accepting any excuse for diversion, struck every one who saw her with admiration, and most of all Theresa, who felt faint if she sat with her brother half an hour.

The sick man had not energy enough *consciously* to appreciate his wife's devotion as much as he did in days of health: at his worst, he recognised her ceaseless ministrations of comfort as little as we acknowledge the help of invisible spirits; and, as he grew better, he became captious even with her—snapped and snarled, and found fault as causelessly as suffering people will; and never met anything but the gentlest good humour from her,—a caress, if he began to fret; a smile, if he lifted himself on his pillow to bewail the cruelty of keeping her indoors all day.



"You shall not, dear Matthew, if you will lie down now, and take a little nap. I will go to the balcony of your dressing-room, the air is delightful there; and when you open those poor eyes again, you shall see what a lovely wreath of Virginian creeper leaves can be arranged over that picture of Mary. There—go to sleep, or I won't move."

People pitied her now excessively: but, since her husband had been out of danger, she had felt sweet peace within; and been more pitiable ever since she married than she was now. Now she had ceased to feel unnatural—that hardest of griefs to a woman; and was able to do a wife's duty thoroughly. It was so much easier to nurse a sick body than to bear with a self-important spirit—to submit to weariness and discomforts, so far easier than to maintain respectful love for prosperous silliness. A woman feels her time of power come, when pity and patience are the dues required of her: besides, something of that inexhaustible maternal tenderness which is stored



up in every woman's heart, comes into use for helpless invalids, and it does any heart good to find the right outlet for its wealth. Helen found it now, and her cheerfulness and serenity were unfeigned.

Arthur had not yet seen her, but hearing one day, early in October, that Sir Matthew was very much better, he went over to Drumchase. It was a ravishing morning. You who object to that word, can scarcely remember how wonderfully beautiful the world looks some days, when a south wind has been from early dawn gradually separating, and softly pushing out of sight, all the clouds which the previous night had gathered: when their last raindrops, fallen as the sun arose, hang long on eave and railing, glittering bright in brightening sunbeams, and giving to the fading trees a lustre almost as gay as spring's freshest green; when the golden leaves mix with the unturned foliage like sunshine, and nature seems to laugh over its own assured decaying. But to Arthur all this beauty in



nature was but the framework of the fair picture his heart longed to see,—the face he almost worshipped still, as the Romanist worships his peculiar saint.

He asked if he could speak to Lady Blinkhorn, but before the footman had well closed the drawing-room door, Helen came in, and taking both his hands, shook them warmly, saying,—

“I thought I saw you, dear Arthur, riding down the western light, and when I heard the step on the stairs, I told my husband who it was, and that I must run down and see you. You have been here so often when I could not; he never liked one to be out of call a minute.”

“How thin and pale you have grown, Helen! has he no consideration for *you*?”

“Oh yes, too much. But, Arthur, I’m *so* happy to-day; he is actually up, and his doctor says he may have a short drive to-morrow, if it is as warm as to-day.”

“Really happy?” The words crept out with a sigh, almost against his will.



"Thankful, most deeply thankful. You cannot think what I felt when I feared he was going, before I had half done my duty, or half loved him as I ought; love as much as one may when people are well, their nearness to death teaches one how to love more; you cannot think how I longed and prayed for time to do better."

Her eyes filled with tears: and Arthur could not mistake the accent of truth.

"*Better?*" he said, surprised at the humility of her affection.

"God helping me, much better. We shall *all* feel the same, dear Arthur, when we are about to die ourselves; do let us try and prevent the anguish of remorse by doing better at once; it may be too late to try soon,—no one can guess *how soon*."

He looked earnestly and reverently at her, and was silent; and she, feeling almost ashamed of saying so much, turned the subject.

"I have another thing in prospect that is making



me very happy this morning. You heard of poor Mrs. Lorimer's death in July? No? I forgot you did not know about her—a married daughter of my uncle, Mr. Trouncer, who has left a number of young children ill-provided for—their father a poor clergyman. Matthew has given me leave to-day to adopt one of the little ones for quite my own, and Mr. Lorimer *almost* gave his consent to the plan, when I sounded him about it through a friend. I have wished to do this so much! I want something young to love, and have envied Mr. Beck for having that dear child-like niece to live with him. Give my love to them both, please; I hope they are quite well. As soon as we may drive so far, I shall bring over my sick man to give his own thanks for all your kind inquiries. But now I want to go back to him, and must be rude enough to wish you good morning."

"Good-by, Helen. God ever bless you! Go back to him whose daily blessing you are; I wanted to tell you something about myself that I



know would please you—that I've been *rather* a better boy lately—and—no, no, I won't detain you now; it does not matter; but, Helen, I am kissing this dear hand of yours once more because, though you would not have me, you have been a blessing to my soul, and saved me from I know not what of evil; good-by, dearest and best!"

In those words she found the answer of prayers which only such love as hers could have persevered in, when hope of its joy was dead.

As Arthur rode back to Mr. Beck's, his passionate heart was humbly praying too, and asking not for happiness, but for pardon.

Ten days later, he and Mr. Beck were sitting together over the study fire; they had put out the candles, and in the ruddy light of smouldering wood, conversation gradually sank to reflective silence. This had lasted some little time, when Arthur taking a cigar from his mouth, with sudden alacrity of gesture, said,—

"Anthony, you often call your pretty little



niece a goose. Do you think she could possibly be such a goose as to have taken a fancy to me?"

"Susie? well it never struck me as likely, but it is not impossible;—not at all—it's worth considering certainly: young creatures easily hang their imaginations upon any stock or stone. You see the imaginative faculty is rather helped than hindered by difficulties, it can more easily transfer ——"

"Yes, yes, my good fellow; but I want your opinion about Miss Susan; you can finish all you have to say upon the imaginative faculty another time. Do you think she has formed no other attachment?"

"Oh, she's wrapped up in Shark's affection, and I believe her feelings for the cat are profound; beyond that, I cannot conceive the child's fancy rambling. You know she was doting on her dolls three years ago, when I first took to her: she is only *just* eighteen. But you don't



mean to say ——” And here he stopped, and looked up from beneath his shaggy eyebrows with interrogative penetration.

“I mean to say that she’s a dear little creature, and that if I thought she could ever be happy as my wife,—and that you would not think me quite unworthy,”—a full puff at the cigar, and then in an abrupt change of voice, “but you probably would not part with her—you would miss her sadly.”

“Oh! not at all, not at all—quite the contrary. She’s a nice little thing, but as idle as a fly, flimsy-brained, always darting off from any chain of reasoning to ask some silly question, or to go through some antics with the dog,—you’re quite welcome to have her, if she really likes you;—it’s worth inquiring into, not at all impossible that she does. You can find out by-and-by; but meanwhile, now our smoke is done, I should like just to go through the rest of that chapter of Berkeley’s with you (mind, I don’t dis-



courage the inquiry); and you will see how curiously he agrees with the German fellow you were quoting this morning about the Phenomenal."



## CHAPTER XX.

"Es zog ein seltenes weh  
 Durch meine seele,  
 Ich war geheiligt  
 Durch diesen wunderbaren schmerz."

KARL BECK.

"I know there are but few who deem the will  
 Can act thus on the mind. The thought, they say,  
 Is free, and when the heart is full, brimful,  
 With some one certain image, then the thoughts  
 Will babble of it, and the sternest will  
 Cannot forbid them. But I say it can;  
 Not at the first; not always. There must be  
 Unwinking vigilance,—indulgence none—  
 Surprises, struggles, battlings, fiercest strife,  
 And wrestling foot to foot; but ah, be sure,  
 The will, when virtuous, conquers in the end."

MARGUERITE A. POWER.

WHEN winter blasts have despoiled the trees of  
 foliage, we see the nests which were carefully  
 hidden as long as they held the bird's treasure:



when hopes are quite extinguished, they are often for the first time revealed. Helen first understood what had been slowly dying in Theresa's mind, as they were one day driving over to dine at Mr. Beck's;—Sir Matthew so fully restored to health as to prefer taking his seat on the box of the carriage, and his sister so completely cured of obsolete romance as to expect nothing more tender than the welcome of an old friend.

"A few months ago, Helen, I actually thought I might be living at the Cottage, and you coming over to dine with me and him! Can you believe such folly?"

Helen looked at her compassionately, and only answered by a close clasp of her sister's hand."

"He was so devotedly attached to me at one time! You can hardly imagine what he was as a young man, seeing him now so different—so absorbed in books."

"Quite."



"But I thought he might still feel a good deal more than came out."

"At his age, dear Theresa! But if you really loved him before, what prevented your making him happy?"

"My poor mother and my own silly pride. Oh, heiresses are much to be pitied; they are so used—at least I was for one—to hearing that no one would be a good enough match for me,—that I had the world to choose from,—that I should meet with many a man as loveable as poor Anthony, with more fortune and higher rank. And really I don't think rich women have so large a choice,—except, of course, among fortune hunters and fools."

"But, at any rate, they are spared the horrors of marrying for a home; you should remember that, thankfully."

"Do you know I sometimes feel as if I should have been a better woman—a happier one too, probably, if I had married almost any one."



"Oh, do not think anything so mistaken for an instant: no, no, that is a fearful error which only those can put about who have never been married,—perhaps," she added, checking the impetuosity of her disclaimer with a smile, "perhaps there is *some* excuse in real life for Lady Mary Wortley Montague's *bon-mot*, that, 'every one had better marry, because, whether they do or not, they are sure to repent of it;' but surely it is better to repent of having risked the happiness of one person rather than of two. There's the Cottage: and the clock striking five: we have come in excellent time. I hope you do not mind such an early hour for dinner?"

"Oh, no, I do not mind anything in that house, but some stinging memories now and then."

"Dear Theresa! I am so much obliged to you for not minding telling me. You may be sure that *I* can feel for you. Oh! there they are in the porch!"

What a complication of fact or feeling a



moment's glance will detect! As their carriage drove up, they saw, through the side glass windows of the porch, Arthur and Susan standing together in the cold yellow brightness of an October evening. His tall figure was turned from them, and its slight bend of the head was all that could be seen; but Susan was on tiptoe putting a pin into his coat front to steady a rosebud that dropped from its button-hole; and her face had a flush of shy and happy pride upon it, which probably no woman could mistake. Helen knew its meaning, and as she came in sight of Arthur's face and the pleased smile which saddened as soon as he saw her, she felt sure that after all the gossips were not wrong in their predictions. She had sincerely wished that they might not be, but yet how different are theory and knowledge in their effects! Even Sir Matthew had noticed the little scene at the door and drawn his own conclusions: so that, when they sat down to dinner, Susan opposite her uncle, wearing a twin rosebud to that which she had



just fastened in Arthur's coat, the sympathy of all present (except Theresa) was enlisted for her innocent joy.

The dawning glow of a young girl's love was attractive and interesting; the least quiver of heat on the unsuspected embers of Theresa's old love would have excited nothing but surprise and ridicule. Helen was thinking of them both; at present it was almost easier to realize the idea of Theresa's sentimentality than of Arthur's new attachment. Conversation flagged that day; and but for Mr. Beck and Sir Matthew's perseverance in speech, many a long pause would have oppressed the little party.

After dinner, while Theresa, in pensive abstraction, examined a sketch of Drumchase which hung on one side of the mantel-piece, and recalled the day on which she had made it, and her feelings and thoughts at that time compared with the fervour of Anthony's, Susan begged Lady Blinkhorn, if she did not mind, to come upstairs and



look at her young canaries, now fully fledged; and when she had shown them, and said all she could about their beauty, and offered to give Helen the best among them for the little girl she was expecting to live with her, she suddenly broke off to say,—

“I’m very, very happy to-day. I am engaged to Mr. Lemayne, only since yesterday. He asked me to tell you, for he wanted you to know it, though he said he would rather not be the one to tell you. I can understand that so well: I didn’t like telling uncle Tony, though *he* guessed it.”

“So did I, my dear girl, and I am *so* glad! I shall like you to be my cousin, and his wife, and I trust you will be very happy and make him so. But, Susan, take *great* care of his love.”

“Do you think that I am likely to lose it?”

“Oh, no; but women often forget that love must have nothing to do with pride, and then sharp sorrow comes.”

“But I don’t think I have any pride, Lady



Blinkhorn. I heard my uncle say a little time ago to Mr. Lemayne, 'Susie has not an atom of pride, but like all other women, she's as vain as a peacock'—I remember his words so well, for it was just when I began to care what your cousin thought of me; and after that, I often thought whether he would not have liked me better, if I *had* a little pride."

"No, dear child, and take care that you never play at feeling it; it has made some people unhappy for life."

Such a little sentence it was, spoken in a quiet bedroom to a smiling girl, and yet how long a tragedy it referred to! Many of our calm wise words are but the epitomized result of our longest wildest sufferings.

The gentlemen had already left the dining-room when Helen and Susan came down; and Arthur, who was virtuously attempting to interest himself in Sir Matthew's florid talk, looked up anxiously as they entered.



"We have been talking of such happy things upstairs, beside the canaries, that we forgot how time went," said Helen, joining her husband and Arthur, for Theresa and Mr. Beck were talking in low tones together on the other side of the room. "I like your wearing the same rosebuds, Arthur," she added, while his eyes thanked her for the delicate cordiality of her words. "How pretty they are, those late roses, and I do not think they fade so soon as the summer roses."

"Possibly, but they are never as sweet," replied Arthur, with so low a voice that she only who stood nearest to him could catch what he said.

"They are beautiful at any time; and a few years ago, if you remember, we should have thought this second harvest impossible."

She had not meant to say anything painful, but a sigh had escaped with these words; and she was fain to open a book of engravings that lay within reach, and let her husband pursue an interrupted argument with the absent-minded man beside her.



As she turned over the leaves she now and then looked at Theresa, and was pleased to notice the happy expression of her seldom untroubled face: she seemed listening more than speaking, and Mr. Beck's manner was grave. Helen heard enough to know that he was talking about old age, and the end of earthly interests: at length some lines he was quoting struck her ear, and she felt further observation an impertinence.

"Ah! while it comes over us, let us assemble  
What once were not visions, but visions are now!  
Now hope shall not torture, now fear shall not tremble,  
And the last leaf of myrtle still clings to the brow."\*

But soon the carriage was announced, and with a kiss on Susan's forehead and a longer grasp of each other's hand, Helen and Arthur said, "Good-by." He came out to the hall with her, and as he helped to put on a cloak, she said again, "Good-by; be sure that your happiness will make *me* happier:" and though in his deep emotion he gave no answer, she felt that her

\* W. Savage Landor.



sympathy relieved him. But now joy on his side—as she trusted—made her feel their separation more complete and final than any they had known before. “Even his thoughts will now quite leave me,” she said to herself, “engrossed by another. I *am* glad; it is what I earnestly desired.” It was true; she herself had recommended the scheme, but *then* she spoke of a thing that seemed unlikely, and now it was to be acted out a few miles off. It was true that she rejoiced for him; but she was just now tired, and reaction was setting in after a strain of sympathetic excitement. With a little inward shudder, she thought as she drove home of all that would now follow;—that light-hearted thoughtless girl would harvest all the love of his intense nature, and she would be shut out for ever from the confidence that now only Susan ought to claim. Natural, and right, and best for them both; and what she would most heartily thank God for bringing about, and yet—yet there was a pang



of the old unconquered heart to endure still: there was the sting of unreasonable regret that Arthur never knew—never would know—what her love for him had been; that for the sake of his peace she had succeeded, even better perhaps than she intended, in keeping him ignorant of it; and that so he must remain till they had both done with mortal passions for ever. Then came an aching throb of resentment about the cruel conduct of his mother; and trying to forget *that*, her thoughts went back still further to the time when Mercy had misled her. She reflected somewhat bitterly upon the mistaken judgment and dissembling course which her sister's zeal had consecrated; the damage done to Arthur's soul by narrow-minded bigotry, alienating him from that religion which offers so wide an embrace of charity and of hope; but which its timid professors had turned into an excuse for the utter reprobation of one whom they saw to be in error.



It angered her to remember that to this day Mercy still prided herself on having effected a coolness between Arthur and his cousin; and nothing would ever persuade her, that by condemning him as irreligious, she had done much towards making him become so. She would have nothing to do with those subtleties of thought; she wished to be a Christian only, and never suspected that with a little more of the philosophy that she despised, she would have been far more Christ-like, both in judgment and procedure.

But Mercy had never enlarged her range of ideas; and, unless a man was good and devout according to Norman's pattern, she found it difficult to believe him anything but a cast-away. Once during her stay at Drumchase, Helen had tried to make her sister sorry for her conduct with regard to Arthur, but, finding her still triumphant on that theme, she left it henceforth for a future state to enlighten her;



resolving never again to risk their sisterly affection on that fatal rock.

And now as irritating thoughts chafed and eddied round it, she was obliged to call them to order by command of faith.

"The hand of God was in all this," she said to herself, "and why it so ordered my lot, I shall know hereafter,—but can never find out here. I do not live to understand His will, but to obey it."

"Are you feeling no chill, Matthew?" she asked, rousing from her own thoughts to see if his cloak was as warmly arranged as it could be. But he was asleep, and Theresa spoke instead.

"I have so much enjoyed this evening, Helen; Anthony Beck's conversation is quite a tonic to one's soul."

"I am very glad you found it so."

They were again silent—both more inclined for meditation than for speech. There was



something indefinably sickening in all Helen's ideas of love just at that moment, and she found it easier to manage herself by turning her thoughts to a practical subject, and beginning to plan what she should do with little Amy Lorimer when she arrived the next day: where she should sleep, and where sit to do her lessons.

Helen was sanguine about the pleasure she would find in teaching her. Beatrice Chadleigh's failure proved nothing against the experiment. She had shared Helen's wish to do something to lighten Mr. Lorimer's anxieties, and had asked for Laura—now a bonny girl of eight—to reside with her at the Grange. But she was not aware of her own strong tendency for making *tableaux vivantes* in her own life with herself and her companions, as they stood in her imagination; and she had thought, unconsciously, that a motherless child would be an interesting adjunct to her home circle. When, however, Laura



appeared in a full drawing-room, thickly freckled, and awkwardly shy, Beatrice was led to accept her presence as a test of charity and forbearance, rather than an ornamental fact; and very soon afterwards thought it best to send her to a good school.

Helen's hopes were not in this instance disappointed. It took but a few days to make her really fond of a plain-featured gentle little girl, not much older than her sister Laura had been when she had occupied Helen's lap in less prosperous times. The attention she gave to the highest and lowest interests of her adopted child disinfected her heart of many a morbid feeling. She lived a less perplexed life while she taught Amy, or joined in her simple pleasures, or directed her childish thoughts to glad or holy truths. She often smiled at herself, finding how eager she had become about little things, how interested in juvenile hopes, which even Sir Matthew could forward and understand. Blessed



link to common human nature! The plain child, while she laid hold of her hungry affections, drew them nearer unawares to the narrow-natured man who could give their mutual pet, indulgence and sometimes fullest sympathy.

Helen had prayed that she might be enabled to get at his truer being, apart from all the false pomposity with which it was suffocated; and Heaven had answered her prayer: but not as she expected. By the long trials that had broken down her pride, she was brought to such patience and simplicity of faith, such courage and integrity of mind, that in dealing with her, even this poor falsified nature of his was forced into consciousness of truth, and little by little it crept towards clearer light.

All unconscious of the extent of her influence, Helen went on with the humble clinging perseverance of a broken will, to try and secure the doing of the Lord's. *Her* will, even her taste, was a point set aside by every day's in-



tention, as immaterial. She had one work to do,—her duty; and, with patient endeavour, she gave herself wholly to it. Her husband did not guess the process of her discipline, and could not understand her motives, but he lived with her as with a guiding angel, and her saying, "It will be right, I think," however much it went athwart his wishes, weighed with him like a mandate from Heaven. He gave himself, with the docility of a good child, to forward all her little schemes of charity; and if he did prattle and swell over them, one of her sweet deprecating smiles would recall her decisive words, so often heard when they were first married—so seldom now.

"Oh, Matthew, not so much fuss about it, pray; duty ought to be a matter of course, and this is mere duty."

The smile gave her meaning, and with a puzzled frown drawing over his tight forehead, he would answer,—



"You know, my love, poor Mary used to say, such matters need a great deal of consideration."

All the pettiness of his nature remained; its absurdities were unremoved by time, but Helen had pierced below them now; she had won to a closer knowledge of his spirit; she had gained insight to that region of feelings where man has communion with God; and she found there a humble child-like faith, a deep sense of helplessness, and a longing for stricter obedience to God's will, quite as sincere as her own. She could honour him there, and love him with womanly indulgence where he showed to less advantage.

Ah, Helen Raymond! was this the end of your early dreams? This the life-plan to which you had looked forward so eagerly? This *your* lot? Married to such a man! living with his selfish, sorrow-bitten sister! consoling yourself with the cares you lavish on an ungraceful, unrelated



child? Even so, and you live on with calm heart and Christian composure. Are you happy? You will not answer that question, except by saying gently that happiness *here* was not in the covenant made between your soul and its Creator. Are you blessed? Yes, truly, for you have meekly accepted the designs of Eternal Love in your lot, and you *feel* what you say, that they *are* best. You have been in former years long desolate, but now you have found the true home of your spirit—peace, in the never-changing presence of the Unseen Father.

If enjoyment on earth is better than spiritual perfection, if temporary ease is more to be desired than eternal victory, such a fate as Helen Raymond's may be deplored, but surely not by those to whom the religion of the Cross is a reality.

In the stories of earlier times we were usually told that the hero and heroine lived very happily to the end of their days; in such a narrative



as this we read of the *beginning* of that true life which *has* gradations of strength, but to its bliss and to its glory there is no ending; for its love is stronger than death; and death shall find an end, but life is everlasting.

THE END.



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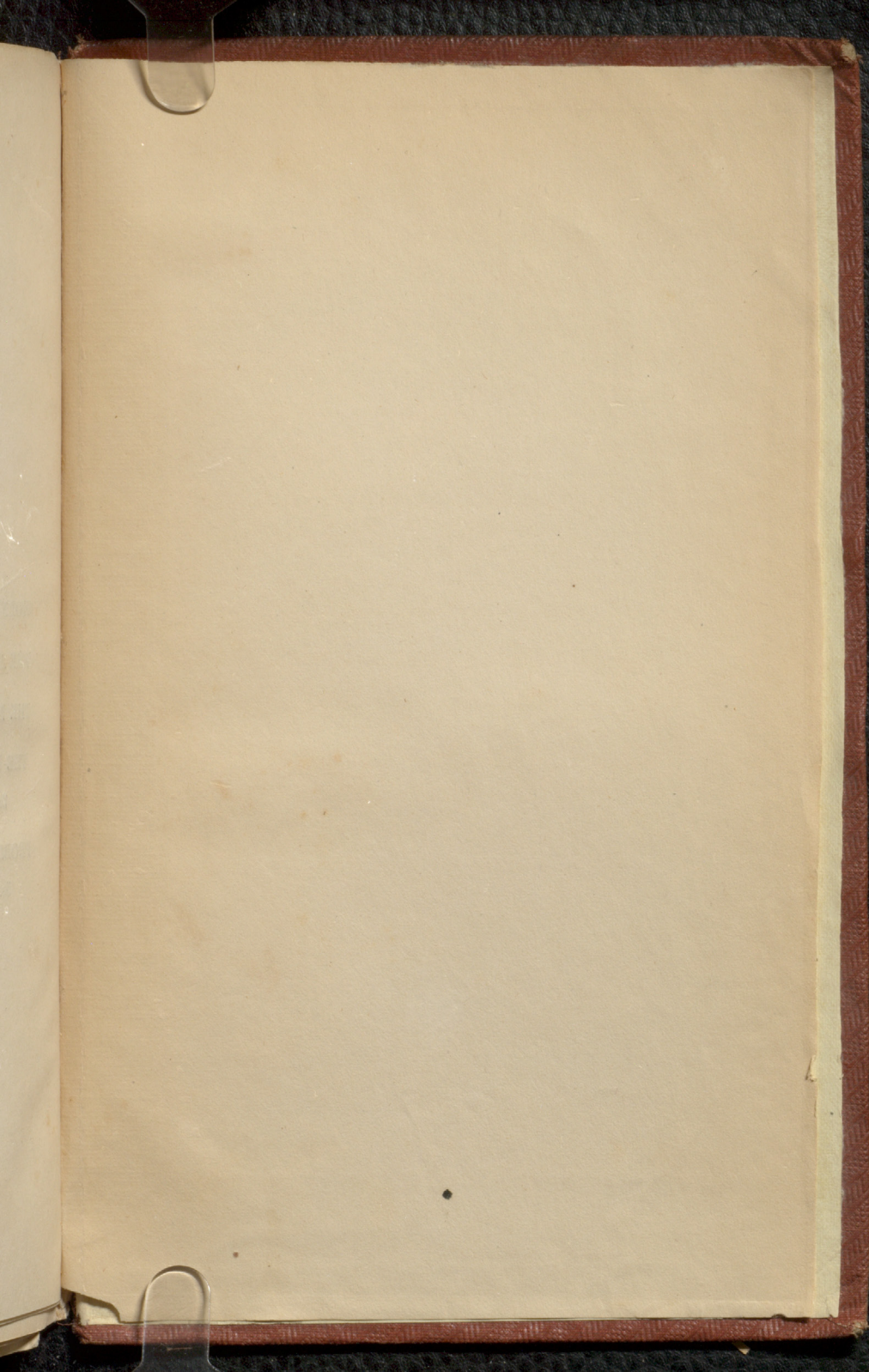
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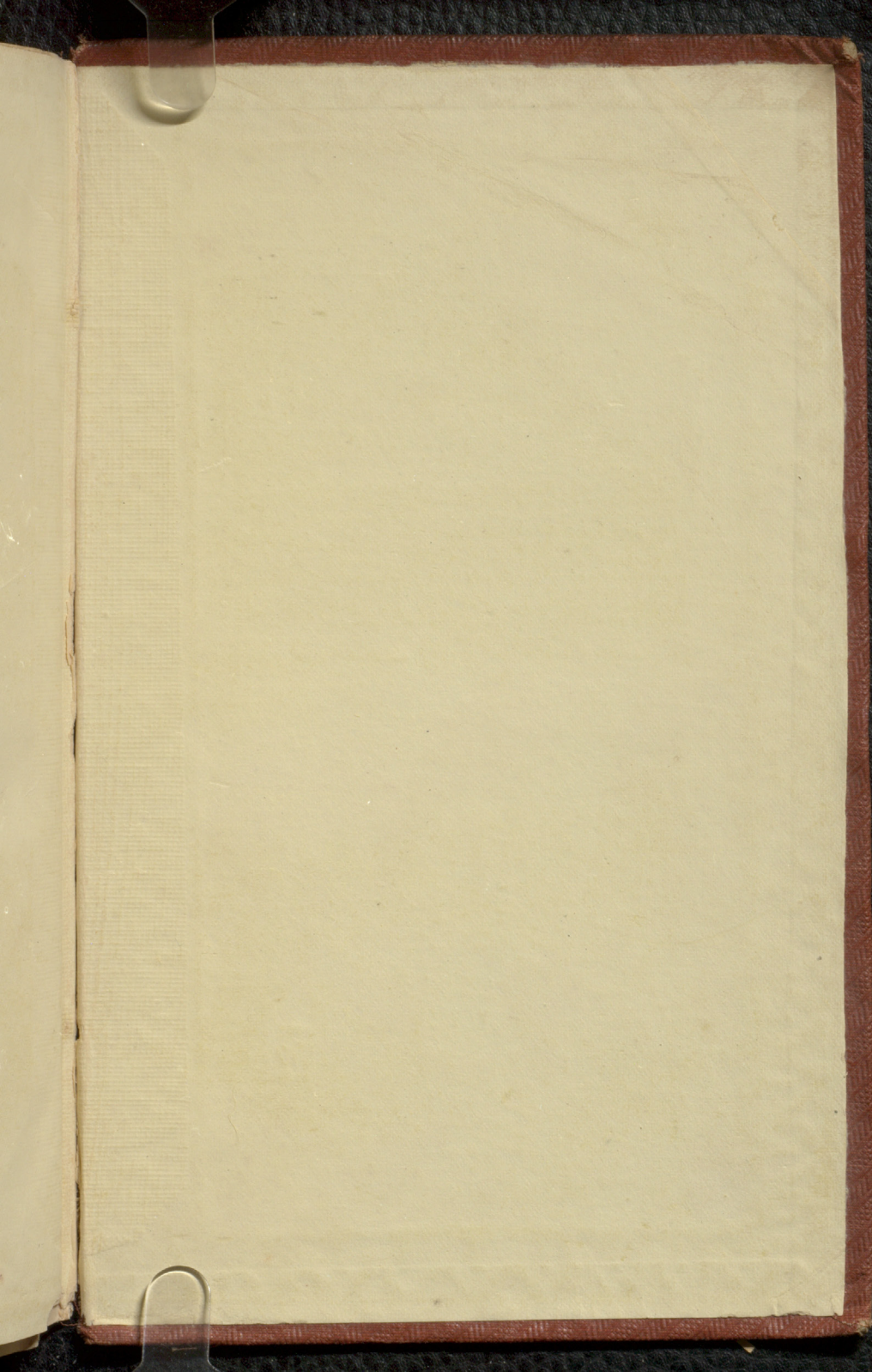






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